

# A Brief History of the Charlotte Fire Department

## The Volunteers

Early in the nineteenth century Charlotte was a bustling village with all the commercial and manufacturing establishments necessary to sustain an agrarian economy. The census of 1850, the first to enumerate the residents of Charlotte separately from Mecklenburg County, showed the population to be 1,065. Charlotte covered an area of 1.68 square miles and was certainly large enough that bucket brigades were inadequate for fire protection. The first mention of fire services in City records occurs in 1845, when the Board of Aldermen approved payment for repair of a fire engine. That engine was hand drawn, hand pumped, and manned by “Fire Masters” who were paid on an on-call basis. The fire bell hung on the Square at Trade and Tryon. When a fire broke out, the discoverer would run to the Square and ring the bell. Alerted by the ringing bell, the volunteers would assemble at the Square to find out where the fire was, and then run to its location while others would go to the station, located at North Church and West Fifth, to get the apparatus and pull it to the fire. With the nearby railroad, train engineers often spotted fires and used a special signal with steam whistles to alert the community. They were credited with saving many lives and much property. The original volunteers called themselves the Hornets and all their equipment was hand drawn.



The Hornet Company purchased a hand pumper in 1866 built by William Jeffers & Company of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The Jeffers Company designed and built some of the best hand engines, but refusal of Southern customers to pay debts during the Civil War crippled the company financially and it was sold in 1875. The Hornets gave the pumper to the Neptune's, who sold it in 1891 to the fire department in Marblehead, Massachusetts for \$100. It was last used in Charlotte at the Schiff and Brothers fire on February 1, 1891. In 1906 this pumper was sold to Westfield, Massachusetts. The American Hand Fire Engine Society of Newbury, Massachusetts purchased the pumper in November 1989 and restored it to mint condition. The City of Charlotte re-purchased the Hand Pumper in 2011 and the Fire Department has returned it home and to its former glory.

The African American Community within Charlotte had petitioned the Board of Alderman and the Mayor's Office for a Colored Fire Company starting in the 1850's. Slave owners during these times were requested to allow their slaves to participate in firefighting activities prior to the 1875 formation of the CFD. By all known accounts, many African Americans participated in all of the Fire Companies and through their continued efforts, two African American Fire Companies were formed, the Yellow Jackets, later re-named the Neptune's, and the Dreadnaughts. On May 20, 1875, the Charlotte Fire Department was formed.

The Hornet Fire Company, organized in 1867, The Pioneer Fire Company, organized in 1874, The Neptune Fire Company, organized in 1868 and the Independent Hook and Ladder Company, organized in 1868, were the four firefighting units chosen by the Board of Alderman to comprise the Charlotte Fire Department. The City of Charlotte provided quarters for each of these companies in the fire limits of the



City. The Hornets were located at 808 East Trade Street; present day address of 222 East Trade, about where the parking deck entrance is for the Epicenter on East Trade Street. The Pioneers were located at 704 North Church Street, present day address of the 100 block of North Church, about halfway down the block on Church Street between Trade and 5<sup>th</sup>. The Neptune's were located at 107 West 6<sup>th</sup> Street, present day about the 100 block of West 6<sup>th</sup>. The Independence Hook & Ladder was located at 628 North Tryon, present day about 203 North Tryon Street. The fire limits were considered the high value areas and required fire stations to be closer together in order to provide quick response and suppression. As the City grew, the primary fire limits essentially remained the same and to this day, two fire stations remain inside the City's primary fire limits, essentially the uptown area.

The City's first offices were located in a building at North Tryon and East Sixth. Quarters for two fire companies were moved there. The Neptune's had the Sixth Street side, and the Independence Hook and Ladder had the Tryon Street side. Originally, the hook and ladder truck was too long for the building and had to be housed outside. The fire companies were prestigious and competitive organizations, much like today's sports teams. Fire Departments throughout North Carolina would

gather periodically to compete in tournaments. Like today's musters, tournament events consisted of timed evolutions of the latest fire service techniques. Departments traveled from all over both Carolinas to participate. One such tournament was held in Charlotte on May 30, 1875, as part of the Centennial Celebration of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Thirty-five volunteer departments participated in the tournament and parade.

The volunteers were organizations formed to meet the need for fire suppression which could not be adequately met by bucket brigades. One of the first serious fires on record occurred in 1837, when four houses burned. The most spectacular fire fought by the volunteers was almost a conflagration which occurred in 1875. The cotton compress, located on South College Street where the Charlotte Plaza Building now stands, burned. One thousand bales of cotton and twenty seven houses were destroyed. Flying brands ignited other fires as far away as the Baxter Moore farm, located at Hawthorne Lane and Central Avenue on the outskirts of the city.

Before the City's first waterworks were constructed in 1882, rainwater was collected in underground cisterns for firefighting. The cisterns were connected to gutters on the buildings throughout the downtown area. To fight fires, the firemen would drop a suction hose into the nearest cistern and pump the water out using the hand pumpers. The volunteer departments had a bad year in 1883. On February 27, the Steam Flouring Mill, located at West Sixth and North Church, was destroyed. On November 17, several homes burned. The fire hose they were using made of leather with brass rivets, failed, and the volunteers petitioned the Board of Aldermen for new hose and reels. On October 16, 1883, the Deceased Firemen's Monument, honoring the volunteers, was dedicated in Elmwood Cemetery, where it still stands. Funds for the monument were raised by the Fire Department Ladies' Auxiliary. It was the first such monument in North Carolina and one of the first in the South.

One of the best known Neptune volunteers was Charles Samuel Lafayette Taylor, born in Charlotte in 1854. Educated in a Quaker school, he was an accomplished musician, a dancing master, a shoemaker, and a barber. Colonel Taylor served as an Alderman on the City's Board of Aldermen between 1885 and 1887. He served in the Charlotte Light Infantry, first as a



Lieutenant and, after a year, was promoted to Captain. When the Spanish-American war broke out, he took command of Company A, First Battalion in April 17, 1898. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel of the Third Regiment on June 23, 1898 and was known as Colonel Taylor from that time forth. He married Ella Louise Perkins of Statesville in November 1905. In May 1891, the North Carolina General Assembly ratified a charter for the North Carolina Colored Volunteer Firemen's Association. Colonel Taylor was a leader in that organization from its inception. He served as financial secretary for many years before assuming the Presidency in the late 1920's. In August 1893, the Association held its convention and tournament in Charlotte and was supported by a grant from the Charlotte Board of Aldermen. One local group of volunteers, the Dreadnaughts, did not fare well in the contests, which were held on Tryon Street. The Charlotte Observer's comment was, "They let Greensboro, Raleigh and Neptunes of Charlotte walk their log pretty badly." However, the Observer noted that "The City is always glad to open her gates to such well-behaved visitors; she will be glad to see them again." The convention was held in Durham the following year, where Colonel Taylor was first elected as the financial secretary.

### **Organization of the Charlotte Fire Department as a Paid Staff**

The change from volunteer firefighters to a paid department was a complicated and controversial process. Early in the summer of 1887, the Board of Aldermen voted to hire a full-time Fire Marshal. The volunteers from three of the stations did not disagree with that decision; however, they asked the Aldermen to give their Chief, John A. Bixby, a salary instead. They considered Chief Bixby capable of handling the duties and responsibilities the Aldermen had specified for the Fire Marshal. When the Aldermen refused and hired O.F. Asbury for the position, the volunteers, feeling their services were unappreciated, turned over their equipment to the Mayor on



July 15, 1887. Three of the four volunteer companies, the Hornets, the Independence Hook and Ladder Company, and the Pioneers disbanded. Special patrolmen were named to stay in the stations and respond in case of fire. Many others volunteered to respond if needed until the Board of Aldermen could act on organizing the paid department. The Neptunes did not disband but continued to serve throughout the crisis,

so the city was not without fire protection. Why the Aldermen chose Mr. Asbury over Chief Bixby is not clear. Mr. Bixby had been Chief of the Norfolk, Virginia Fire Department before moving to

Charlotte to go into business. On the other hand, Mr. Asbury had been active as a volunteer fireman for many years, first listed as such in 1875.

In July 1887, the Aldermen appointed Police Chief W.F. Griffin as Acting Fire Chief. At its regular meeting on August 1, 1887, the City of Charlotte Board of Aldermen voted to accept the recommendations of its fire protection subcommittee and created the Charlotte Fire Department. The committee consisted of Aldermen W.E. Shaw, D.W. Oates, Harry Clarkson, and J.M. Hagler. Fire Marshal Asbury reported to Chief Griffin. One of his first duties was hiring four full-time firefighters and eight on-call personnel. W.A. Cruse was the Department's first paid firefighter. The on call personnel responded from their usual occupations when called by the ringing of the fire bell. The full-time firefighters were paid \$25 a month and the on-call personnel, \$8 a month. Mr. Asbury's salary was \$40 a month. The first fire station was located at 222 East Trade Street.

As Fire Marshal, Mr. Asbury was determined to convert from hand-drawn to horse-drawn apparatus, arranging for horses from a nearby livery stable to be used. The firemen had to run for the horses before they could respond to a fire. Mr. Asbury also went to Atlanta to study their methods and implemented as many as he could. One of his most notable accomplishments was the installation of Charlotte's first fire



alarm system, which began operating in November 1887 with forty seven boxes. Keys to each box were distributed to the four closest houses, and homeowners were instructed how to turn in an alarm. To guard against false alarms, the system was designed so that the key used to turn in an alarm could only be taken out by a fire officer with another key. Therefore, the key could always be traced and its owner, who would be held responsible in case of false alarms. Thomas Edison designed the system, and came to Charlotte to supervise its installation.

## The Early Years 1889 – 1927

In May 1889, Chief Griffith resigned as Fire Chief and the positions of Police Chief and Fire Chief were separated. John Bixby was appointed Fire Chief and served for four years.

City government had no centralized permanent home until the first City Hall was built at North Tryon and East Fifth in 1891. Quarters were provided for the Fire Department at the back of the building, with the apparatus bays facing Fifth Street. The East Trade Street station was turned over to the Neptune Company when the Department moved.

The early Department fought a number of serious fires. On February 1, 1891, a bitterly cold morning, a fire broke out in a lodging room on the second floor of Schiff & Brothers store on the Square. The occupant described as a woman of ill repute, had been drinking and tried to kindle a fire to warm herself. She fell asleep and the warming fire went out of control. The fire flashed over at 4:30 a.m. and spread to the adjacent building, which housed the Wilson Drug Company, wholesale druggists, and Thomas Reese and Company, retail druggists, and threatened the surrounding business district. Police Officer Irwin broke into the room of origin but failed to see the woman. She was later rescued but was badly burned and died later that evening. Fortunately, there was no wind and the fire was confined to the two original buildings, which were destroyed.

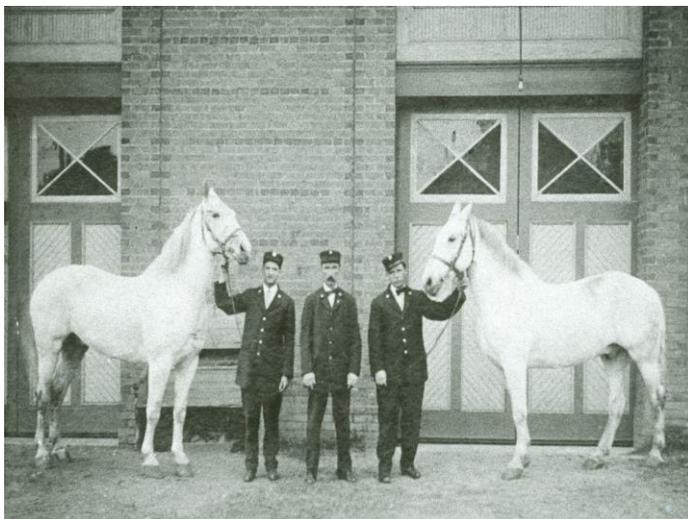
Chief Bixby and three African-Americans, who were volunteers with the Neptune Company, were burned when some oil caused a flashover. Two people were arrested for driving over fire hose. After the fire an unfortunate incident resulted in murder. Neptune volunteers Sam Richardson and Isaiah Brunson had provided good service at the fire. During the firefighting operations, they had taken several drinks of whiskey and when it was over, went to Kirk's bar room. They appeared to be joking with each other when Richardson slapped Brunson's coat pocket, breaking an egg that was in it. Brunson drew a knife and stabbed Richardson in the neck, severing his jugular vein. Richardson ran next door to Dr. Wilder's Drug Store, where he collapsed and died. Brunson was arrested for murder shortly thereafter.

On Sunday, March 5, 1893, Midnight Police Officer Rigler turned in Box 36 at Trade and Tryon for the Wittkowsky Dry Goods Store. The fire began in the third floor shoe department, broke through all six windows on the third floor, and burned off the roof. Loss was estimated at \$78,000. The fire

threatened all the businesses on Osborne's Corner, all suffering some damage. The Neptune volunteers saved McAdam's Drug Store during the incident.

Chief Bixby resigned in 1893, and his resignation precipitated a year of unrest for the Fire Department. The office of Fire Chief went back to Police Chief Griffith, who served until his death on May 13, 1893. H.W. Jetton, a member of the Police Department, was then appointed Fire Chief. In May 1893, he was succeeded by W.E. Culpepper.

Even in a department as small as the Charlotte Fire Department was then, personnel problems sometimes arose. On September 28, 1896, the Board of Aldermen met in a special called meeting and suspended Chief Culpepper for public intoxication from that date until October 16, 1896. He was suspended rather than terminated because of his previous good conduct and because this was the first instance of such behavior. The Aldermen were obviously serious about maintaining good conduct by City employees. They also passed an ordinance stating that any police officer or fireman who was intoxicated on or off duty would be terminated. Also, part of the ordinance was a provision that police and firemen would be terminated for using profane language on the streets or alleys in the City of Charlotte.



In May 1897, Chief Culpepper resigned. He was succeeded by Captain W.B. Glenn, who served until 1901 and then accepted a position as Captain at Station 2. W.W. Irwin succeeded him as Fire Chief and served until 1905. Shortly after he became Chief in 1901, a second fire station was built at the corner of North Church and West Trade Streets. That building was demolished within several years to make room for the construction of the

Selwyn Hotel. The second station was then moved to South Church between Trade and Fourth Streets. In November 1901, the Fifth Street firemen were paid \$50 a month and the Church Street firemen, \$45 a month.

In 1905, the development of Dilworth, Charlotte's first suburb, required construction of a third fire station. Chief William Silas Orr, who succeeded Mr. Irwin as Fire Chief, was responsible for building

the Dilworth fire station in the 1200 block of South Boulevard, occupied in 1907. The building still stands today. It was closed in 1948, sold and renovated into retail offices.

In 1906, Wadsworth Livery Stables on South College Street burned, killing 40 horses. Also, in May 1906, a warehouse fire at the South Atlantic Waste Company in North Charlotte resulted in a \$200,000 loss.

In 1907, Chief Orr discontinued the system of on-call firefighters, which necessitated an increase in the number of full-time firefighters. Charlotte's last volunteers, the Neptunes, disbanded.

J.H. Wallace became Fire Chief on August 1, 1911. On April 1, 1912, after much deliberation, the Department purchased its first motorized apparatus. It seated 2 men and carried 40 gallons of chemicals and water. The new apparatus was so successful that more motorized equipment was purchase and the station on South Church Street was closed. This left two stations, the one at City Hall having all motorized apparatus and the South Boulevard Station, with all horse drawn equipment.

The Department suffered its first departmental fatalities on July 1, 1914 in a dynamite explosion on South Cedar Street. Firefighters were responding to a fire call in a barn behind the home of a railroad contractor. Not knowing about the dynamite, they had stretched a hose line and were beginning their attack when the dynamite detonated, blowing the barn up. Captain W.B. Glenn died instantly. Chief Wallace and three other firefighters were injured



and rushed to Presbyterian Hospital. Surgeons were unable to stop the internal hemorrhaging and Chief Wallace died at 12:25. The double funeral service for the two was one of the largest ever held in Charlotte. J.H. Wentz, who was married to W.S. Orr's first cousin Margaret, was appointed to

replace Chief Wallace. He served as Fire Chief almost three years and was then appointed Captain at the Dilworth station.

On February 16, 1917, a fire engine responding to an alarm collided with a streetcar at the intersection of East Park Avenue and South Boulevard. Eight Fire Department employees were sent to Presbyterian Hospital. George Spittle, W.F. Simpson, and James Morris were seriously injured. Captain Spittle sustained serious head trauma but recovered enough to go home. He had to return to the hospital later where he was operated on for mastoiditis. He died shortly thereafter, thus becoming Charlotte's third fireman to die in the line of duty. Captain Spittle is buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

M.M. Wallace, J.H. Wallace's brother, was appointed Fire Chief on June 15, 1917. Also on June 15, 1917, Hendrix Palmer, one of the firefighters who came to Chief Wallace's aid at the South Cedar Street explosion, was appointed a Captain at Headquarters Station, returning to the Department after a year's leave of absence. Mr. Palmer's experience as an auto mechanic and fire engine driver were recognized by the department and he was given the additional assignment of master mechanic. That assignment took on greater importance as Chief Wallace took all the horse-drawn apparatus out of service during 1917. With the complete changeover to motorized equipment, Station 2 closed on



Church Street and the Dilworth Station was re-numbered to Station 2.

Chief Wallace supervised the construction of a third fire station, located in the 800 block of Louise Avenue to serve the Belmont neighborhood. On September 1, 1917, the Board of Aldermen approved payment of \$8500 for an American LaFrance aerial truck.

A fire in the hospital at Camp Greene destroyed the laboratory and operating room on December 30, 1917. The camp volunteers found the building well involved when they turned out. It was a very cold night, and firefighting efforts were hampered by frozen hydrants and a closed water valve. The Charlotte Fire Department responded with its big six cylinder pumper and protected exposures. After that fire, the Department leased a steamer and a team of horses to Camp Greene for \$45 a week. Camp Greene was located west of the

city, in the area of Camp Greene Street, Remount Road, and Wilkinson Boulevard. The marker at Monument Street and Wilkinson Boulevard commemorates Camp Greene.

A conflagration on July 2, 1918, destroyed forty eight homes and left two hundred fifty persons homeless. The fire began on Caldwell Street, between Boundary and Vance Streets, and spread quickly. The firefighters had to retreat and make a stand on Vance Street. Fire hose burned in the street from the heat.

On September 27, 1918 the Realty Building burned in a spectacular fire. The building contained the offices of the Charlotte National Bank and the Independence Trust Company. The fire was thought to have begun in the elevator equipment. The penthouse burned and two elevator cars fell to the basement. Thousands watched the fire, which occurred at 10:30 in the evening. Charlotte's Mayor was among the spectators, and he gave high tribute to Chief Wallace and the firemen for their efforts.

The Department changed to a two platoon shift system on October 1, 1919. This required hiring eight additional personnel, bringing the total number of employees in the Department to forty three. Firemen worked seven daylight shifts and then seven night shifts. Shifts changed on Sunday, which meant that one Sunday a person was off and the next, he would work 24 hours straight.

On December 17, 1922, the Trust Building located on South Tryon Street burned in a spectacular fire. The building was totally involved, and four of its six stories collapsed into the street. Assistant Chief Hendrix Palmer sent for Chief Wallace, who called all off-duty personnel and all but one piece of apparatus to the scene. Three firefighters, Captain Al Moody, Bob Barnes, and Malcolm Ross, were injured, but the Department saved the Piedmont and Scott Buildings which were exposed to danger from the fire. The Trust Building was the first in North Carolina to have electric elevators and was the tallest building in the city at its construction. The fire began in an oil furnace near an elevator shaft. The initial alarm came in at 4:34 a.m. from Box 39.

The Smith Wadsworth Hardware Store, located in the first block of East Trade, burned on December 16, 1923. A general alarm was struck at 8:25 p.m. and the fire departments of Statesville, Monroe, Gastonia, and Mooresville responded to help. Every piece of hose in the Department was used. Firefighters stretched hose to the roof of the Central Fire Station and fought the fire from there. Military Police, all available Charlotte Police Officers, and one hundred twenty men from Camp

Greene's infantry also assisted. Electricity was disconnected and trolley service stopped to downtown during the fire. Efir's Department Store was gutted and other stores in the block were damaged. Fire loss was estimated between \$500,000 and \$800,000.

The Paramount Film Exchange, located at West Fourth and South Church Streets, burned on February 8, 1924. The fire began in paper discarded behind a radiator and the building was racked by three explosions. Forty-three hundred reels of nitrocellulose motion picture film were destroyed. Three people jumped from the second floor, one of whom was caught by Fireman Bob Barnes. At the time, this fire was considered among the most spectacular in Charlotte's history. Chief Wallace said it was the most difficult fire ever fought here.

A New City Hall was erected at 600 East Trade Street and was occupied in 1925. The Headquarters Fire Station also moved to a station behind City Hall at 125 South Davidson Street. Since Headquarters had moved six blocks east of the middle of the city, the Department built a fourth station in the 800 block of West Fifth Street, at North Graham. The Headquarters station was used from 1925 until it was closed in December 1990, when a new Station 1, located at 221 North Myers Street, opened.

Assistant Chief W. Hendrix Palmer was promoted to Fire Chief May 13, 1927. He held the position for twenty one years, retiring on June 24, 1948. Chief Palmer was an innovative and progressive leader and his influence on the Charlotte Fire Department lasts to this day. Chief Palmer was well known and respected in the American fire service. He rejected lucrative offers from other departments to stay in Charlotte. In 1929, his salary was \$2,700 per year. He was active in the North Carolina Fire Chiefs Association and the International Association of



Fire Chiefs, serving as President of IAFC in 1940. He supervised the construction of the first training facility the Department had. Located at 2601 East Seventh Street, the building was named the Palmer

Fire School and for many years was the site of the North Carolina Fire College, a program he helped found. Chief Palmer was also active in civic affairs; he was one of the founders of the Shrine Bowl, held in Charlotte each December.

A new Station 3, located at Belmont and Allen Streets in the Belmont neighborhood, was opened on March 22, 1928. This station was in use until February 1971. The Louise Avenue station closed when the new Station 3 opened. It was abandoned and eventually demolished in the mid-1980's.

On May 17, 1928 Engine 3 responded to a 4:25 a.m. fire alarm in the county. One mile north of the City limits on the Concord Highway, it collided with a grocery truck. All four members of the company were injured and taken to the Charlotte Sanatorium. Captain R.E. Mendenhall, who was thrown over the dash and under the truck, died of his injuries, becoming the fourth Charlotte fireman to die in the line of duty. Firemen A.H. Sikes, F.F. Oates, and Neil Stokes were all hospitalized. After the accident, the off-duty shift was called in to man reserve apparatus. The entire motorcycle squadron of the Police Department was in Captain Mendenhall's eighty two car funeral procession. The replacement fire truck cost \$12,000.

On January 21, 1929, Charlotte annexed developments on the east and west sides of the city. The annexation required the construction of two additional stations. Station 5, located at 224 Tuckaseegee Road, now Wesley Heights Way, and Station 6, located at 249 South Laurel Avenue. Both were occupied on April 24, 1929. Station 6 originally housed an Engine and a Ladder, Truck 3, later re-numbered to Ladder 6. Station 5 had a Ladder added in 1951. As



the city grew, Ladder 6 became Ladder 18 and Ladder 5 became Ladder 10 and then Ladder 13.

On February 8, 1929, FF W. Graham Cathey, a member of the line crew responsible for maintaining the fire alarm system cable, died when the telephone pole he was on snapped in two. He rode the pole down and it landed on top of him. The accident occurred at the corner of Randolph and Caswell

Roads. He was twenty three and described as a star outfielder and one of the most popular young firemen. Firefighter Cathey is buried in the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church Cemetery.

Chief Palmer established the Fire Prevention Bureau in 1929, under the leadership of Captain H.C. Kissiah. The firemen made quarterly inspections, emphasizing properly operating stove and furnace pipes, electrical wiring, and housekeeping. In 1930 over six thousand inspections were made. Chief Palmer was well ahead of his time in fighting to outlaw wood shingle roofs. City Council passed the ordinance doing so in 1939.

The Belk Department Store burned in a large fire on July 14, 1930. Alarm boxes 23, East Trade and 118, Fifth and College, came in at 1:41 p.m. The second alarm was struck at 1:48 and the third alarm at 1:50. One hundred ten firefighters used fifteen hose streams and all but three pieces of the Department's apparatus in fighting the four-hour blaze. Ten firefighters were injured. One, Joe Westnedge, was trapped when the first floor collapsed into the basement where the fire began. He was trapped several minutes until others pulled him out with a fire hose. Fire loss was estimated at \$300,000.



The Fire Department was also involved in the larger Charlotte community. A newspaper article published on July 29, 1930 relates that the Fire Department opened hydrants to give showers to dozens of children who could not get to the lake. For many years, the firefighters collected and repaired toys to distribute to needy children at Christmas.

A fire broke out on the third floor of the Wilder Building on July 31, 1930. Royal Manufacturing Company stored waste cotton on that floor. The fire interrupted the evening radio program on WBT, which was located on the sixth floor. All the fire companies in the Department responded.

In 1931, the Charlotte Fire Department had six stations and a staff of 112. The Department was divided into two divisions, each headed by an Assistant Chief. The fifty three officers and firefighters

in each division were assigned to eleven fire companies. The apparatus they rode consisted of one 75-foot tractor drawn aerial, four 750 gallon triple combination pumpers, one 500 gallon triple combination pumper, and three American LaFrance city service trucks. Other departmental vehicles included a supply truck and two automobiles, a Buick sedan for the Chief and a Nash sedan for the Assistant Chiefs.

Purcell's Department Store, located at 112 North Tryon, suffered a fire on December 13, 1932. Three engines and two ladder companies responded. They confined the fire to the basement by cutting holes in the floor and using cellar nozzles to spray water and extinguish it.



One of the largest and most complex fires the Department had ever fought occurred on May 29, 1933, when the Virginia Carolina Chemical Company on West Tremont Avenue burned. The fire went to six alarms. Fed by sulfur and molten lead, the flames shot hundreds of feet into the air. Several firefighters were severely burned as acid pouring down the street destroyed their boots. A cloud of sulfuric acid vapor hung over a large portion of the city.

Firefighter Joe S. Westnedge was killed on March 6, 1934 responding to a house fire at 117 South Cecil Street. He was riding the running board of Engine 7, the second Engine out of Headquarters Station, on the pump panel side. Firefighter B.W. Lott jumped off of Engine 1, which had preceded Engine 7, and started stretching hose across the intersection of South Cecil and East Fourth Streets. The Engineer of Engine 7 swerved to avoid hitting him but could not, and lost control. The engine careened through the intersection, jumped the curb and pinned FF Westnedge between the pump panel and a tree killing him instantly. FF Lott sustained a concussion and leg injuries, and O.M. Caldwell was also injured. Westnedge, described as one of the best players on the Department's baseball team, was working for someone that day. The accident occurred approximately where the Third Street Connector merges into Fourth Street at Kings Drive. Firefighter Westnedge is buried in Oaklawn Cemetery.

Pruitt L. Black became the Department's seventh on-duty fatality when he died at Station 4 on April 1, 1934. He had worked an extra shift, and Engine 4 had been busy that night. An alarm came in and as he got up out of bed, he tripped over the suspenders of his quick hitch pants, and fell head first down the pole hole. He died later in the day of a fractured skull. Firefighter Black is buried in Elwood Cemetery.

As a result of Firefighter Westnedge's death in 1934, safety became an important issue. In 1935, the Department purchased the first fully enclosed cab fire truck manufactured in the United States. It had seats for twelve firefighters and was built by Mack. This apparatus was another piece of firefighting equipment that was well ahead of the times. The schematic drawings hang on the wall at Station 1.

The Charlotte Fire Department was among the first in the country, and was the first in the South, to use radio in its communications. In 1935, the Radio Division moved to City Hall and increased its power from 50 to 250 watts. Power was doubled to 500 watts in 1938.



As Charlotte continued to grow, the need for fire protection also increased. Station 7, located at 3210 North Davidson Street, opened in 1935 to serve North Charlotte.

Training was a high priority for Chief Palmer, and he was responsible for the Department's first 48551719 formal training program. That first program consisted of drills held one hour a day for thirty days. Assistant Chief C. M.

Griswold was responsible for training. Drills were held at First Ward Elementary School, where firefighters used the stair tower to raise ladders. By 1938, a drill tower was erected at 2701 East Seventh Street. The Palmer Fire School was completed in 1940 and the first program, a class for officers, began on April 15. The building was dedicated on May 13, 1940. It was built by firemen, using stone from an old farm house on the outskirts of the city, which they trucked in. Chief Palmer appointed J.M. Munday, Drillmaster and J.F. Morris, Assistant Drillmaster.

Chief Palmer took command when the Masonic Temple, located at South Tryon and East Second Streets, burned on March 4, 1937. The initial alarm came in a 12:15 p.m. Every piece of apparatus in the city responded to the fire, which began on the second floor where renovation work was being done. Fire loss was estimated between \$250,000 and \$300,000. The building was repaired but was demolished in 1987. The columns in front were salvaged and moved to Rock Hill S.C.

A three alarm fire on April 10, 1937 caused \$75,000 damage at Queen City Coach Company. The building was the bus terminal, located at 417 West Fifth Street. Firefighters from Station 4 caught the hydrant just outside the station's doors and laid hose lines across the street. The initial alarm came in at 4:56 a.m. The fire began when gasoline leaking from a bus was ignited by a coal stove. One firefighter was seriously injured.

A fire on Christmas Eve 1939 destroyed a two story apartment house at 1611 East Fourth Street. Two firefighters were injured in the fire, which went to three alarms.

In 1940, the Charlotte Fire Department had a staff of 126 and seven fire stations. Firefighters worked 84 hours per week. Chief Palmer recommended a reduction in hours, but it was not until 1946 that firefighters were granted one day a week off. They also got a 15% pay raise at that time. The annual report of 1940 is the first to mention masks and breathing apparatus.

The fire with the largest life loss in the history of the Charlotte Fire Department to date occurred March 15, 1940 at the Guthery Apartments on North Tryon Street. The fire began in the basement at the rear of the building in the boiler room, spread quickly through interior hallways, and cut off escape routes. Seven people died at the scene and seven were injured. Two later died in



the hospital, bringing the total deaths to nine. At least one death was caused by injuries when a woman leapt three stories to escape the flames. The fire was reported around 1 a.m. Assistant Chief Donald Charles pulled a general alarm on his arrival and all firefighters and apparatus in the department responded to the scene. The fire eventually went to six alarms. Firefighters were hampered by subfreezing temperatures and by the panic of the occupants. Two firemen were injured by people jumping. The building was repaired and still stands with the damage from the fire still visible on the back side.

The war years were quiet for the Department. Austerity was the rule for the Department as well as the entire country. Sixty-three firefighters took leaves of absence to serve in the Armed Forces. Their names are on a plaque which hung on the apparatus floor at old Station 1.

A three alarm fire broke out at Mogan Heating Company and Sutphin Company, located at 601 South Cedar Street in the Patterson Building, on March 8, 1942. The Sutphin Company processed waste paper and the fire was thought to have originated there. Both Chief Palmer and Assistant Chief Griswold responded to the fire.

In spite of the hardships, the Department continued to function. A newspaper article noted there were 359 alarms in the month of February 1943, which was a record.

The end of World War II marked the beginning of a period of growth for Charlotte. As mentioned earlier, in 1946 the firefighters received an increase in pay and reduction in hours, which Chief Palmer had requested six years earlier. The Department assumed responsibility for fire protection at Morris Field, which ultimately became Charlotte/Douglas International Airport. A Captain and six Privates manned a 500 gpm triple combination pumper that was housed in a wooden garage. They were separated from the rest of the department to the point of having their own budget. The Morris Field firefighters were granted civil service and became part of the department in 1947. Up until this time, fire protection for Morris Field was a civilian firefighting force provided by the Military. From 1937 through 1941, the airport had no fire protection.

In 1946, the members of the department abandoned the retirement system they had organized in 1932 and joined the North Carolina Local Governmental Retirement System. They withdrew from the

NCLGR System in 1947 after the General Assembly approved the creation of the Charlotte Firemen's Retirement System. This system is still in place today.

In 1947, Fire Prevention began inspecting nurseries and nursing homes in cooperation with the Child Welfare Division of the Board of Public Welfare.

On June 24, 1948 Hendrix Palmer retired as Chief of the Charlotte Fire Department, ending a career spanning forty four years, twenty one of them as Fire Chief.

### **The Charlotte Fire Department 1948 – 1969**

Assistant Chief Donald Charles was promoted to Fire Chief, replacing Chief Palmer, effective June 25, 1948. He presided over the opening of Station 8, located at 1201 The Plaza. Station 8 originally housed Engine 8 and Truck 5, later Ladder 8. The original Dilworth station, built in 1907, was closed

when a new Station 2 was opened across the street at 1215 South Boulevard. Both new stations were activated in 1948.



In 1950, the City of Charlotte covered 31 square miles and the fire department had a staff of 192. After spending an appropriation of \$200,000, the Department activated a Class "A" fire alarm system on May 23, 1950. The Department had 28 pieces of rolling stock in 1951, with two in reserve.

Fire Marshal H.C. Kissiah retired on August 21, 1951, after thirty two years in the Fire Prevention Bureau. Fire Chief Charles appointed Deputy Chief J.F. Morris to replace him.

Recruit training was instituted in 1952. Before that time, new firefighters were immediately assigned to stations and learned firemanship on the job. The first recruit class consisted of eight men, who were assigned to the Training Division for two weeks before being sent to stations. Also in 1952, a

course in pump operations was taught at the Palmer Fire School. It was so well received that the North Carolina Firemen's Association took it over as a separate annual school. Walter Black was appointed Chief of Training in 1952. He supervised the construction of a 20' by 20' smoke house on the training grounds in 1953.

A specialized aircraft crash/fire/rescue unit was purchased for the Morris Field station in 1954. It was a 500 gpm pumper which carried 1000 gallons of water and 100 gallons of foam, as well as four 50-pound cylinders of carbon dioxide.



Station 9, located at 1901 East Boulevard across from Freedom Park, was built and occupied in 1954.

June 1954 was a bad month for the Charlotte Fire Department. On June 9, the Armory Auditorium burned. The first alarm came in at 5:34 a.m., and eventually the incident went to three alarms. Firefighters had a close call when a wall collapsed near where they were working. Investigators determined that the fire was set by a teen-aged girl. Ironically, the Southeastern Fire Chiefs Conference was being held in Charlotte when this fire occurred. The Grady Cole Center on Kings Drive was later built on the site of the auditorium. On June 24, 1954, the Southern Railway Freight Terminal, located on South College Street between Second and Fourth Streets, burned in a spectacular explosion and fire. Chief Charles spotted the alarm from Headquarters and turned in the first alarm. A general alarm was struck at 4:10 p.m. All apparatus was used at the scene and the off-duty shift was called in. City Manager Henry A. Yancey requested mutual aid from the fire departments of Gastonia, Concord, and Monroe. Eleven Mecklenburg County volunteer fire departments also responded to provide fire protection to the rest of the City and to fight the fire. Fifteen thousand feet of fire hose was used, and the smoke was visible for seventy miles. The fire was brought under control, but not put out, in an hour and five minutes. It was thought to have started in drums of motion picture film. In addition to the building, twenty three freight cars and seven automobiles were destroyed. The terminal was built around 1900 on the site of the cotton compress which had been destroyed in a spectacular fire in 1875. Fire losses for the Armory Auditorium and

South Freight Terminal fires were estimated at \$876,752. This was 68% of the total fire loss for the entire year.

In 1955, Deputy Chief W.O. Dowdy was appointed Chief of Training. Recruit training was expanded to thirty days, and the pre-fire planning program began. Pre-fire planning grew out of the on-site survey program which began as a training exercise in 1952. This exercise was developed to make firefighters aware of sprinklers, shut-off valves, and utilities in industrial properties. The department continues these types of surveys today.

Chief Charles served as President of the International Association of Fire Chiefs in 1957. The firefighters' work week was reduced from eighty four to seventy two hours.

Station 10, located at 2156 Remount Road, and was activated on May 16, 1957. At that time, the Morris Field station was closed and the fire company relocated to Station 10. The second Engine



located at Station 10, was originally numbered Engine 13 but was later re-numbered as Engine 22.

In July of 1957, a military fighter crashed at Morris Field. The Charlotte Fire Departments response was less than acceptable. This led to a study where the City Council approved a plan that three entities would be responsible for insuring fire protection at the airport. The Charlotte Fire Department would provide the staffing, the Airport would provide the funding and the North Carolina Air National Guard would provide the crash

firefighting trucks and a fire station. This agreement went into effect in 1958 and remains in place today.

In 1958, the Maintenance Shop, located at 618 West 28<sup>th</sup> Street, was built. It replaced an inadequate facility located at the rear of Station 1.

Station 11 was built and activated on June 16, 1959, at 620 West 28<sup>th</sup> Street, to protect the industrial and residential properties along North Graham Street and Interstate 85. It originally housed Car 4, later renamed Battalion 2, Engine 11 and Engine 14, later re-numbered Engine 23 then Engine 63.

On July 9, 1959, firefighters responded to an alarm at the site of the former Charlotte Chemical Company on West Templeton Avenue just off South Boulevard. The building was being demolished; a large vat had been left, perhaps forgotten, in the basement. Charlotte had been hit by the remnants



of a hurricane earlier in the month. The heavy rains penetrated the exposed vat, which held a hundred pounds of metallic sodium sealed in kerosene, and came in contact with the sodium, setting off a violent reaction which ignited the kerosene. When firefighters arrived, they assumed it was merely a kerosene fire and fought it as such,

but to no avail. In spite of their efforts, the fire grew hotter and more intense. They had just decided to use foam when the vat exploded. Miraculously, no one died, but thirteen firefighters were injured, several critically. One FF lost both ears and most of his face and had to retire because of these injuries and another later committed suicide. This incident shook the Department to its foundations and had several profound effects. The need for and use of training was immediately obvious, and firefighters began studying as they never had before. The Department began to buy and issue protective clothing; previously individuals had been responsible for buying their own. The Fire

Prevention inspection program was broadened. Fire Marshal J.F. Morris developed a marking system to identify hazardous materials in a building. He designed a set of diamond-shaped symbols to indicate the presence of hazardous materials and their levels of flammability, health hazards, and reactivity. The National Fire Protection Association later adopted the system as Standard 704.



Annexation became a way of life as Charlotte grew explosively in the 1960's. In 1961 the Fire Department staff occupied the offices in the City Hall Annex vacated by the Health Department when it moved to Blythe Boulevard. These offices were in close proximity to Station 1 and were used until the General Office staff moved to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center in April 1988.

Station 12, located at 420 Inwood Drive, opened in 1961 to serve the rapidly developing South Boulevard/Woodlawn Road area. Station 12 opened with Engine 12 and Car 5, later re-named Battalion 3.

Two fire stations opened in 1962. Station 13, located at 4337 Glenwood Drive, covers the Thomasboro area, and Station 14, at 114 North Sharon Amity Road, covers the Cotswold area.

Fire Chief Donald Charles retired on July 27, 1963, and Assistant Chief Walter J. Black was promoted to replace him.

An Eastern Airlines DC7 went off the runway at Douglas Airport on July 21, 1964 and caught fire. The Department's crash/fire/rescue crews extinguished the fire without harm to the aircraft's fifty six passengers and crew. This was the first major incident since the 1958 agreement was enacted. Eastern Airlines recognized the CFD for its actions and a copy of the certificate still hangs in current Fire Station 17.

Doggett Lumber Company, located at South Boulevard and East Park Avenue, burned on October 19, 1964. The initial alarm was received at 12:47 p.m. A general alarm was struck at 1:03, with calls to off-duty firefighters to respond going out over radio and television. The entire block was threatened

by the blaze, but firefighters' efforts averted catastrophe. Lumber, six trucks, the warehouse, and equipment were destroyed. Fire loss was estimated at \$200,000. Eight firefighters were injured in the blaze, which resulted in the first general alarm since the Southern Railway Terminal fire ten years earlier.

Station 15, located at 3617 Frontenac Avenue, opened in 1965. New hires for this station brought the total number of Operations personnel to 360. The 1965 Annual Report is the first to mention a Fire Prevention program being taught in the schools. The Training Division sponsored life saving clinics in which 2,000 citizens were instructed in first aid.



Station 16, located at 6623 Park South Drive, opened in 1966 to provide fire protection to the burgeoning SouthPark and south Charlotte area.

In December 1966, the Fire investigation Division was formally organized. In a memo, it stated the Fire Investigation Division was organized with a budget of

\$250.00 to buy an arson kit. Assistant Chief J. Jamison was designated as the Chief Fire Investigator. A 24-hour course in Arson Detection and Unlawful Burning was taught that year. Its effects were immediate. In 1967, 143 fires were identified as incendiary in origin, compared to 15 in the previous year.

The Department hired its first African-American firefighter, Hazel E. Erwin, on October 18, 1967.

Fire Department resources were severely strained by back-to-back second alarms in July 1968. The first fire was at the A & P Bakery on Hovis Road. Companies had been back in the stations less than twenty five minutes, after working most of the night, when the alarm came in for the James Lee

Motor Inn, located at North Tryon and Sixth Street. Chief Black initiated a re-call of the off duty shift for both fires.

Chief Black reorganized the Fire Department in 1969, dividing it into two divisions, Operations and Administration. The Operations Division consists of the fire suppression personnel; there were 435 firefighters in the Division when the reorganization took effect. As part of the reorganization, the firefighters' work schedule was changed to a three platoon, 56 hour work week. The City was divided into three districts, each headed by a District Chief who reported to the Assistant Chief of Operations. In addition Battalion 3, then called Car 5, was moved from Station 12 to Station 10. Recruit training was also revamped, expanding to an eleven week program for new firefighters.

### **The Charlotte Fire Department 1970 – 1989**

David E. Taylor, Sr. was the second African American firefighter, hired on February 10, 1971. He was promoted to Captain on September 17, 1975, to Battalion Chief on February 15, 1984, and to Division Chief on August 12, 1987. He was moved to Deputy Fire Chief in 1993.



In February 1971, Station 3 on Belmont Avenue was closed and the engine company there moved to Station 8. Ladder 8 was moved to Station 15 and re-named Ladder 15. The engine company that moved from Station 3 to Station 8 was renamed Engine 24. Engine 24 was one of five companies that were the second engines in various stations. Engine 20 was at Station 1. Engine 20 was disbanded and reorganized as Squad One in 1974. Squad One was a manpower unit originally with three members and an Officer, later increased to a total of five personnel per day. Their first apparatus was a GMC Van. Engine 21 was at Station 4, Engine 22 was at Station 10, and Engine 23 was at Station 11. Engine 22 was moved to Station 12 and some of the personnel were assigned to form Ladder 12. The rest of the personnel were assigned to various pieces of apparatus in the City. Ladder 5 was moved to Station 10 and became Ladder 10. When Station 20 opened in 1974, the remaining 20-series engines were changed

to 60-series numbers: Engine 21 became Engine 61, Engine 23 became Engine 63, and Engine 24 became Engine 64.

The Administration Division consisted of support personnel and the Fire Prevention Bureau. Fire investigation moved into the Fire Prevention Bureau at this time, and the offices of Community Relations and Planning and Research were created.

Station 18, located at 2337 Keller Avenue, just off Beatties Ford Road, opened on December 18, 1970 to serve the University Park/Beatties Ford Road area.

Chief Black retired on November 23, 1971. John E. Lee, Chief of the Oak Ridge, Tennessee Fire Department, was appointed to replace him. He was the first and only Fire Chief to date that did not to come up through the ranks of the Department.

Station 4 on West Fifth was closed in 1972 when a new Station 4 was built at 525 North Church Street. The building was sold and later was leased back to the department and housed the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Fire Museum and Education Center for several years until the owner refused to renew the lease. It stands vacant now adjacent to a modern day high rise.



An Eastern Airlines jet crashed just south of the runway on September 11, 1974, killing seventy two people.

Fortunately for the responding crash/fire/rescue companies, the incident occurred at shift change, so extra personnel were available to assist. Response to the crash pointed out deficiencies in cooperation among the emergency response agencies and led to the first Inter-Agency Disaster Response Plan.

Three fire stations were built in 1974 due to annexation. Station 3, located at 6512 Monroe Road for the Idlewild/Independence/Monroe Road corridors, Station 19, located at 1016 Sardis Lane, for the Providence Road/southeast Charlotte area, and Station 20, located at 9400 Nations Ford Road for the

southwest section of the City. A fourth battalion was also added at that time and was headquartered at Station 3.

In 1975, the Charlotte Police and Fire Academy opened at 1750 Shopton Road. The building was a share by CPD and CFD and remained in use until 2002.

In February 1976, Benny Warrick was hired as the first civilian Telecommunicator in Fire Communications. In March 1976, Marcia Simmons was the first female and second civilian hired. She was promoted to Fire Communications Manager in 1983, becoming the first female Support Services Manager.

The annexation in 1978 required the construction of three more stations, Station 21, located at 1023 Little Rock Road, for the northwest section of the City, Station 22, located at 1917 Sugar Creek Road for the northeast section of the City, and Station 23, located at 9400 W.T. Harris Boulevard, for the Hickory Grove area.



On November 1, 1978, the Charlotte Fire Department joined the Mecklenburg County Medical Emergency Response System as first responders within the City. This program is still in place today.

In 1979, the Department received a request from the Nalle Clinic to buy Station 9 on East Boulevard. That station's proximity to Station 2 on South Boulevard and its poor physical condition rendered the offer acceptable. It had been built on a filled lot and the building had settled significantly. Station 9 was closed in 1982 when a new Station 2, located at 1817 South Boulevard, was opened. Engine 9 was relocated to Station 17 at Charlotte/Douglas International Airport. Renamed Engine 17, this company added to the fire protection on the west side of the city, where the concentration of industrial properties made extra protection necessary. By adding a dedicated Engine

Company to the airport, it also eliminated the need to cross staff the Engine with Blaze Unit personnel, an arrangement that had been in place since the mid 1960's.

In 1980, the Department disbanded two engine companies in response to the City Council's direction to cut expenses. Engine 61, the second engine company at Station 4, and Engine 63, the second engine company at Station 11, were taken out of service in June 1980. Engine 64, the second engine at Station 8, was left in service to provide service in the Belmont neighborhood and response to the nearby hospitals.

The Department hired its first female firefighter, Rebecca S. Brown, on September 3, 1980. She was promoted to Captain on February 6, 1985 and to Battalion Chief on January 7, 1998. She retired on January 4, 2014.



On May 23, 1981, firefighters initiated a sickout to protest the pay raise proposed for the new fiscal year, which gave police officers a 14% raise and firefighters 9%. Roughly 30% of the on-duty personnel either did not report for duty or walked off the job. The action lasted four days, until the City cancelled all sick leave.

On May 27, 1981, a fire occurred in a cotton warehouse at J. King Harrison Company, located at 1609 North Brevard Street. The fire went to three alarms. Off-duty personnel were recalled to staff reserve apparatus and Mecklenburg County volunteer departments were called to respond under mutual aid. Total fire loss was \$962,500. Fire investigators determined the fire was incendiary in origin, but no one was arrested in the case.

Station 24, located at 7132 Pineville-Matthews Road, opened on June 5, 1981 to provide fire protection to the annexed areas along Carmel Road and Highway 51.

On September 8 1981, the department hired its first African American female firefighter, Linda J. Lockhart. She retired on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

On December 11, 1981, Bryant Heating and Air Conditioning Company, located at 6700 South Boulevard, burned in a three alarm fire. The initial alarm was received at 5:58 a.m. Firefighters began with an interior attack but were ordered out after explosions were heard in the building. One firefighter was injured when an old ladder truck tipped over. The fire was determined to be intentionally ignited. The total loss was estimated at \$2.4 million. This fire is regarded as the prelude of the Fire Investigation Task Force because it was the first time the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms National Response Team came to Charlotte. Also cooperating with fire investigators for the first time in a multi-agency setting were Charlotte Police Department Detectives and Special Agents with the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation.

On September 13, 1982, a chemical fire erupted in a warehouse used by Baxter-Harris Company at 1716 North Tryon Street. Firefighters were hampered by a delayed alarm which allowed the fire to



escalate. Toxic smoke forced the evacuation of several adjacent neighborhoods. Fire suppression was further hampered by the presence of the herbicide, Paraquat, in the warehouse. This meant that all runoff from the fire had to be contained to prevent contamination of creeks and downstream

water supplies. Handling this complex emergency required the coordinated efforts of firefighters, police, Health Department and EPA officials, and many others. Damage was estimated at \$790,000. Investigators determined the fire began when sodium hydrosulfite, a textile bleaching agent, which is highly reactive to water, was exposed to humidity in the air due to a damaged drum. As a result of this fire, Charlotte Mayor Eddie Knox appointed a Blue Ribbon Study Committee which made seventeen recommendations regarding the City's planning and response to chemical emergencies. Battalion Chief Luther Fincher was appointed Hazardous Materials Coordinator and given responsibility to implement the committee's recommendations.

The rank of Division Chief was created on November 1, 1982 to implement a recommendation of the Productivity Study of 1978. The three Division Chiefs each commanded a platoon and reported to the Assistant Chief of Operations. J.W. Cox, K.D. Helms, and H.L. Wilson were promoted to the rank of Division Chief on this date.

Fire Chief Jack Lee retired on December 31, 1982 and Assistant Fire Chief Richard L. Blackwelder was promoted to Fire Chief effective January 1, 1983.

On January 7, 1983, Engine 13 assumed the responsibilities as the Hazardous Materials Response Team. It carries out the normal functions and duties of any engine company, but its members also hold the hazardous materials technician certification to enable them to deal effectively with hazardous materials emergencies. Station 13 was chosen to house the Haz Mat Team because of its proximity to the interstate highways and because many of the hazardous materials incidents to which the Department had responded occurred in that area. Ladder 10 was moved to Station 13 and became Ladder 13.

One of Chief Blackwelder's first actions was to rewrite the City's Fire Code. The updated code requires anyone who stores, handles, uses, or manufactures hazardous materials to disclose information about them to the Fire Department. The hazardous material permitting process was changed to require annual renewal of permits. City Council adopted the code in June 1984 and it is still in place with updates.



A two-alarm fire on August 25, 1983 destroyed the Charlotte Jewish Community Center, located at 600 North Sharon Amity Road. The building and its contents, including irreplaceable books and artifacts, were a total loss. Fire loss was estimated at \$600,000. The fire was reported to Station 14 by a passerby at 4:18 a.m. Investigators determined that the fire was incendiary in origin and arrested four youths. Two were subsequently convicted of the crime.

Bitterly cold weather was responsible for a rash of fires during the Christmas holidays in 1983. Fire companies responded to 477 alarms in a four day period, which was a record high. The largest fire during the weekend was a two-alarm blaze in a vacant warehouse at 301 East Trade Street on Christmas Day. The building, valued at \$220,000, was totally destroyed. Firefighters were hampered by lack of access to the building, by structural collapse, and by the weather. The high temperature that day was 14 degrees F. City Transit officials provided a bus for firefighters to rest out of the cold. Investigators determined the fire was set by a homeless person who burned a mattress. He was arrested, but charges were dropped due to insufficient evidence.

On April 10, 1984, under a mutual aid request, the Hazardous Materials Response Team responded to Marshville, NC in Anson County where rail tankers carrying methanol derailed and burned. This was the first response outside Mecklenburg County for the team.

With the annexation of Providence Plantation and Raintree in southeast Mecklenburg County in July 1984, the Fire Department agreed to buy the Providence Volunteer Fire Department's station, located at 4529 McKee Road. The building was renovated and opened as Station 9 in December 1985.

On August 25, 1984, a car carrying a store-breaking suspect collided with a gasoline tanker at 500 East Independence Boulevard. A three-alarm fire resulted, causing \$125,433 in damage to the tanker and twenty four exposures. Fortunately, the incident occurred at 4:37 a.m., when there was little traffic on Independence, one of the city's busiest thoroughfares. There were no injuries beyond the suspect, who sustained burns that hospitalized him briefly.

The Fire Investigation Task Force was formally organized in December 1984. Fire investigators from CFD, Charlotte Police Investigators from CPD, and Special Agents with the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms combined resources forming the Task Force. Under Chief Fire Investigator A.G. Goldner, the Task Force renovated the vacant



Station 2 building at 1215 South Boulevard. The Task Force still occupies the building today.

Hazardous Materials Coordinator Luther L. Fincher was named Director of Emergency Management in December 1984 and the organization was placed under the Fire Department.

An escapee from a Texas mental institution set a fire that eventually became a three-alarm blaze in the vacant First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church at 721 North Tryon Street on November 14, 1984. The roof of the structure was burned off and the interior gutted. Damage was estimated at \$860,000. The escapee was arrested, but the District Attorney did not press charges after mental health officials could not agree on her competency to stand trial. The gutted building stood roofless until Bank of America funded the project to restore it into an Arts Center in 1998.

A two-alarm fire at Scorpio's, a nightclub located at 2301 Freedom Drive, caused \$200,000 damage on Christmas Eve, 1984. Investigators determined the fire was intentionally ignited. In the first major federal case for the Task Force, three men were arrested and convicted in federal court for arson and conspiracy to commit arson. The three operated a competing nightclub whose business had been suffering.

The Department activated Battalion 5 on February 6, 1985. It was originally headquartered at Station 16 but eventually moved to Station 20.

Charlotte's old wooden ballpark, Crockett Park, burned in a spectacular three-alarm blaze on March 16, 1985. Located at 400 Magnolia Avenue in Dilworth, the park and its contents were totally destroyed. Loss was estimated at \$1 million. Investigators determined the fire began when three youths set the contents of a trash can on fire in a locker room. The three were arrested and convicted of carelessness with fire in Juvenile Court.

Old Station 17, located on the grounds of the North Carolina Air National Guard at Charlotte/Douglas International Airport, was owned partially by the Guard and partially by the City. The building was built in 1958 and inadequate to house the engine company and two aircraft crash/fire/rescue companies assigned there. It was replaced when the Air National Guard built a new \$1.1 million station, which opened in April 1985. The new station is part of the Airport's perimeter. The Aircraft

Rescue Firefighting companies respond onto the runways while the engine company is situated to respond off airport property. Today Station 17 is also the location of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Headquarters.

The largest single fire loss ever experienced by the Charlotte Fire Department occurred on April 23, 1985, when a three-alarm blaze broke out at Royster Fertilizer Company at 2300 LaSalle Street. Property and contents loss was estimated at \$7 million. Investigators were not able to determine the cause of the fire due to the extensive damage.

Little Hardware, a Charlotte landmark at 1400 Mint Street, burned in a three-alarm fire on April 11, 1986. The fast-moving blaze, which began at lunchtime, resulted in \$1,757,000 in losses. It began in the shipping area. The 12:10 initial alarm to the Fire Department was delayed while employees fought it unsuccessfully with fire extinguishers. Investigators could not pinpoint the fire's cause but theorized that it began with a cigarette thrown into cardboard.



Rather than abandon old stations that are in good locations, the Fire Department decided to renovate them. Station 5, at 224 Wesley Heights Way, was the first to be completely renovated. The process involved completely gutting the interior of the building and starting over again. Engine 5 moved back into the station in 1987.

On April 12, 1987, a four-alarm fire destroyed most of a new apartment building at 1239 Kelston Place at the East Pointe Apartments. Twenty-two people were made homeless by the fire, which caused an estimated \$559,525 in damages. The fire began when a grill being used on a balcony was overturned, igniting the landscaping and siding. High winds and low humidity contributed to the rapid spread of flame. Three weeks later, on May 6, 1987, a three-alarm fire destroyed another

building at 1206 Kelston Place, in the same complex. This fire left eleven people homeless and began when a gas grill malfunctioned and ignited siding. Fire loss was estimated at \$229,000. These two fires highlighted Chief Blackwelder's attempt to have a residential sprinkler ordinance passed by the General Assembly for Charlotte. The bill failed in the Senate, but it sparked statewide interest in changing the building code. These two fires were a major catalyst in banning the use of grills on wooden balconies in multifamily dwellings.

Engine 25 and Engine 26 were put into service on June 30, 1987 to serve annexation areas. Station 25 is located at 6741 Pleasant Grove Road and provides service to the Oakdale and Coulwood communities. Station 26 is located at 9231 South Tryon Street and serves Arrowood and the Westinghouse Boulevard area.



After 32 years with the Fire Department, Chief R.L. Blackwelder retired on December 29, 1987. Emergency Management Director Luther Fincher was promoted to succeed him.

On February 15, 1988, after two years of intensive work, a computer-aided dispatching system was implemented in Fire Communications. The system was based on one developed for the Fort Worth, Texas Fire Department. It automated the clerical and recordskeeping functions of dispatching, giving telecommunicators time to concentrate on decision-making and assigning fire companies. This project was overseen by Division Chief Doug Cook.

A three-alarm fire destroyed Chem-Way Corporation offices and warehouse, located at 1816 Parker Drive, on March 21, 1988. The initial alarm was received at 10:52 p.m., and fire companies worked through the night to contain the blaze. Fire loss was estimated at \$2.5 million. Investigators determined the fire began when, earlier in the day, employees disposed of spilled sodium hydrosulfite by sweeping it up and putting it in the dumpster. This was the same chemical that caused the Baxter-Harris fire in September 1982.

Assistant Chief Robert J. Ellison retired in August 1988 to take the position of Fire Chief in Hilton Head, S.C. Division Chief Roger Weaver was promoted to Assistant Chief of Administration, and Battalion Chief James F. Fesperman was promoted to Division Chief to replace him.

A Myers Park mansion was destroyed in a two-alarm fire on December 22, 1988. The house, located at 600 Hermitage Road, had been extensively renovated earlier in the year. The fire was caused by an electrical short in the attic and caused an estimated \$750,000 in losses.



On January 1, 1989, the second most deadly fire in the history of the Charlotte Fire Department occurred. Five members of a family died in a residential structure fire at 1517 Norris Avenue. The victims ranged in age from one year to sixty five years old and represented three generations in this family. Investigators determined that the fire was caused by a cigarette dropped into the cushions of an upholstered chair on New Year's Eve.

In June 1989, Engine 27 went into service at Station 22 to serve the UNCC and University City areas which were annexed that year. At the same time, Engine 28 went into service in a temporary facility located at 8031 Old Statesville Road to cover the I-77 corridor annexation. Station 27 was constructed at 111 Ken Hoffman Drive, and opened in July 1991. It houses Engine 27, Ladder 27, and Battalion 2. Station 28 was built at 8031 Old Statesville Road and opened in March 1991.

The second fire station to be renovated was Station 7, at 3210 North Davidson Street. Originally occupied in 1935, the building had significantly deteriorated. The smallness of the lot and the building itself presented challenges. The architect was forced to eliminate the pole to have enough room for the number of beds and bathrooms required. Station 7 was reopened in August 1989 and still anchors the flourishing arts district in North Charlotte

On September 22, 1989, Charlotte experienced the largest natural disaster in its history. Hurricane Hugo roared ashore at Charleston and pushed inland, causing damage as far as Doughton Park on the



Blue Ridge Parkway. Charlotte was fortunate that the worst of the Category 5 storm hit the city between midnight and 6 a.m. Had the time been twelve hours later, the possibility of life loss would have been tremendous. At 7 a.m., on September 22, ninety percent of the city's electrical distribution system was

destroyed. Trees were down all over the city, with the worst damage in older neighborhoods like Myers Park and Dilworth with their large willow oaks. The Charlotte Fire Department responded to 322 alarms in the twenty four hours of September 22, three times the normal call load. The alarm level did not fall to normal again for ten days. The most serious incident involved the rescue of a woman trapped in a second floor bathroom when a tree fell through her home in Dilworth. Her husband had to drive to Station 2 for assistance because the telephones were out. Firefighters from Stations 2 and 1 worked frantically to free her as the trees swayed around them in winds that gusted up to 87 miles per hour. She was seriously injured, sustaining a broken pelvis and ruptured spleen, among other injuries, but they freed her and she recovered. As the firefighters finished their work, a tree fell on the reserve ladder they were riding in, destroying the aerial. There were no deaths in Charlotte during the storm, but three people died in the days immediately afterwards in accidents relating to cleanup efforts. Line crews from all over the Eastern seaboard were called in to rebuild the electrical distribution grid, but three weeks elapsed before everyone had power again. Cleaning up the debris from the hurricane took about six months to complete. There were several serious fires caused by electrical problems when power was restored. An unattended candle left burning was the cause of the largest fire, which occurred at Charlotte Woods, an apartment complex at Scaleybark and Woodlawn Roads. This was ten days after the storm and the loss was estimated at \$1 million.

## The Charlotte Fire Department 1990 – 2013

Ebenezer Baptist Church, located at 733 East Trade Street, was destroyed in a two alarm fire on September 2, 1990. This fire resulted in losses of \$1,193,000 and was caused by improper use of an extension cord.

On January 1, 1991, after sixty five years, the Charlotte Fire Department closed Station 1, Headquarters, located at 125 South Davidson Street behind the Old City Hall. A new Station 1, at 221 North Myers Street, was built three blocks away. The new five-bay station originally housed Battalion 1, Engine 1, Ladder 1,



Squad 1 and the Communications Division. Squad 1 was later moved to Station 14 and then to Station 3. It is still stationed there and has been re-named Rescue 3.

Two new engine companies were activated in June 1991. Engine 29 went into service at Station 3 to cover the Idlewild Road annexation. It moved to Station 29, located at 2121 Margaret Wallace Road, in March 1993. Engine 30 went into service in a temporary facility located at 4707 Belle Oaks Drive to cover the Steeleberry Acres annexation, south of Charlotte/Douglas International Airport. Engine 30's still alarm area covers the southern portion of Charlotte Douglas Airport including the Cargo Ramp and the US Airways Heavy Maintenance Hanger. This fire company has a dual purpose, not only does it provide the normal services of an engine company, it also provides backup for Stations 17 and 41. Station 30 still remains in its temporary location today.

The old Naval Reserve Center, located at 725 West Sixth Street, burned in a two-alarm blaze in the evening of July 24, 1991. Losses were estimated at \$140,000. Investigators determined that the fire

was intentionally ignited, but there were no arrests in the case. The building was vacant at the time of the fire.

An acetylene cylinder dropped by a worker started a spectacular blaze that destroyed the National Welders facility at 5301 Old Dowd Road on October 14, 1991. The worker who dropped the cylinder



left the scene and called the alarm in from a mile away. The fireball could be seen from uptown, and firefighters had to work in a defensive mode to avoid being struck by bottles of compressed gas as they ruptured. The first tactical priority was to protect a large hydrogen storage system that was close to the area of origin. At the height of

the incident, one runway at Charlotte/Douglas International Airport was closed so that aircraft would not be struck by cylinders launched by the fire. Losses were estimated at \$1 million.

Division Chief Joe McElhaney retired in December 1991 and Battalion Chief Bobby W. Davis was promoted to replace him.

In 1990 through 1991 a recession was occurring and the City faced a revenue shortfall. Its response was the rightsizing initiative, which was designed to cut the workforce by reengineering service delivery processes and to meet City Council's requirements for cost cutting through competition and privatization of services. City Council exempted public safety services from competition, but support services in the Fire and Police Departments went through the process. In the Fire Department, two divisions were affected; the Mechanical Shop and the Logistics Division. Over about a year and a half, 273 City positions were eliminated but no City employee lost their job. Employees whose jobs were eliminated were placed in other positions. Employees who were eligible to retire received an incentive of six months pay to do so. Forty-two Fire Department employees took advantage of the program. Assistant Chief V. Carson Watts took the incentive and retired at the end of 1992. At that

point, the command structure was collapsed one level by the elimination of the Assistant Chief rank. The Division Chiefs and remaining Assistant Chief were all reclassified as Deputy Fire Chiefs. The four Deputy Chiefs were David Taylor, Bobby W. Davis, Roger Weaver, and James Fesperman.

Station 6, located at 249 South Laurel Avenue, opened at the same time as Station 5 in 1929. It was designed by C.C. Hooks, one of the city's premier architects of the time, and the station with its stone exterior has always been a landmark in Myers Park. Like the other old stations, time and constant use took a toll on the building. In 1991, the interior of Station 6



was gutted and the exterior cleaned and restored. Engine 6 moved back into the building in 1992. The National Fire Protection Association chose Station 6 as one of the twelve fire stations in the United States highlighted in its 1997 calendar, which celebrated NFPA's centennial.

Our Gang Inn, a restaurant located at 4750 Albemarle Road, burned in a two alarm fire on February 8, 1992. Loss was estimated at \$500,000; investigators determined the fire was incendiary in origin.

On October 21, 1992, H & S Lumber Company burned in a spectacular two alarm fire that was actually an exposure fire. The fire began in a sign shop at 1420 South Mint Street around the corner from H & S, which is located at 520 West Summit Avenue, when an extension cord for a neon sign overheated and shorted out. H & S's building and inventory were destroyed. Loss was estimated at \$230,000. Fire companies worked through the night to contain the blaze. Interestingly, President George H. Bush was scheduled to visit Charlotte the next day, traveling by rail. The Secret Service was adamant that his train would not go through smoke from the fire, so firefighters returned to the scene and foamed the debris to keep smoke down.

In 1992 Captain Harley Cook was promoted to Chief of Training. Chief Cook served in this position until his retirement in December 2004. Chief Cook had been assigned to the Training Academy since 1986 and his innovative training methods helped shape the department into what it is today.

A violent thunderstorm in the early evening of July 2, 1994 was the cause of the largest single incident the Charlotte Fire Department has ever responded to. At 6:42 p.m., USAir flight 1016, carrying fifty two passengers and a crew of five from Columbia S.C, approached Charlotte/Douglas International Airport. The pilots aborted their original landing and radioed the control tower that they were going around. The DC-9 encountered wind shear, which slammed it into the ground. It skidded



approximately a thousand yards through a field and woods, hit two large oaks just outside the Airport perimeter fence, broke up, and burst into flames. The tail section came to rest on the carport of a home across Wallace Neel Road from the trees. A vehicle driving on the road became entangled in downed power lines.

Bystanders called 911 and were connected to MEDIC while air traffic controllers dispatched the crash/fire/rescue units from Station 17. Fire Communications received the alarm from MEDIC at 6:45 and dispatched a first alarm assignment of two engines, a ladder, a Blaze unit, two tankers, and a Battalion Chief. At the same time the Primary Crash Phone was ringing at Station 17 alerting Blaze Units of a downed aircraft. Blaze 1, 2, 5 and 7 responded to the last known location. Engine 30, coming from the south, was the first on the scene, arriving at 6:50. Engine 21, Tanker 21, and MEDIC 7 arrived shortly thereafter, coming in from the north, while the Blaze units, coming from the east down the path the jet had taken through the woods, were on the scene at the same time. Communications dispatched the nearest Squad and the hazardous materials units at 6:51. A second alarm was struck at 6:55. The third alarm was struck at 7:15, the fourth at 7:29, and the fifth at 7:42. Deputy Chief B.W. Davis heard the original alarm and responded, arriving at 7:13 and taking command. At 7:45, the Deputy Chiefs instituted a recall of off-duty personnel. Thirty-two Firefighters, two Battalion Chiefs, five Telecommunicators, and the Logistics Officer responded. In

all, twenty three fire companies with ninety six firefighters responded to the scene. This represented half the on-duty resources of the Department. In addition, volunteers from West Mecklenburg, Steele Creek and Pinoca responded to the scene. Four volunteer departments, Pineville, Derita, Newell, and Long Creek moved up into Charlotte fire stations and provided fire coverage in the City. By 9 p.m., the twenty one survivors had been extricated and transported to area hospitals. One survivor died at Carolinas Medical Center, bringing the total deaths to thirty seven. Deputy Chief Davis declared the incident under control at 10:18 p.m., three hours and twenty eight minutes after the original dispatch. Emergency workers were on the scene throughout the night, but the difficult work of clean-up and body removal could not begin until daylight, Sunday, July 3. This work began shortly after 8 a.m. Sunday morning and did not cease until the thirty seventh and last body, an 8-year-old boy, was extricated late on the morning of Tuesday, July 5. The Charlotte Fire Department was on the scene



until 4:18 p.m., Wednesday, July 6; ninety three and one half hours after the incident began.

On January 29, 1995, fire destroyed a home at 1715 Queens Road. The alarm came in at 2:42 a.m. When firefighters arrived, flames had broken out of the windows on all three levels. The house was being renovated, so the fire alarm system was off, but the

family dog alerted the occupants in time for them to escape. Loss was estimated at \$1,050,000; investigators could not determine the cause.

A young mother and three preschool children perished in a house fire at 728 Seneca Place on March 22, 1995. Investigators determined that one of the children started the fire while playing with matches or a lighter. The fire was in the basement, and rescue efforts were hampered by partitions which cut the space up and made movement difficult for the firefighters.

Deputy Chief Bobby Davis retired in June 1995 and the decision was made not to fill his position. The three remaining Deputy Chiefs proposed a reorganization that caused serious unrest in the Support Services Divisions. Given that unrest and the fact that the Fire Department's services are

exempt from competition, Acting City Manager Pam Syfert decided to commission an organizational study of the Department by an outside consultant. MMA Associates of Boston won the contract with a bid of \$84,000. A team led by Dr. John Granito investigated all facets of the Department and its services and issued a final report in July 1996. This report made one hundred forty four recommendations for improvements. The consultants concluded that the Department effectively discharges its mission, but that there were a number of areas that needed improvement. The first of these was the structure of the Command Staff, which was changed to require the Deputy Chiefs to work a four 10-hour day schedule so that they would be available to the Fire Chief. There was also a need for Relief Battalion Chiefs and extra firefighting positions to ensure that minimum staffing for all units could be maintained. The Relief Battalion Chief positions were reinstated and the Department was allowed to overhire twelve firefighters. In fiscal year 2000, this number was increased to twenty, and the positions were added to the Department's total position count. Communications staffing, which had not increased in over twenty years, was also upgraded, and needs for additional technology and support were addressed for that division. The consultants also suggested that the Department establish a master plan and gather information about the community service program. The Fire Department has met this recommendation by its participation in the City's business planning process. The study was a success in bringing many of the Department's needs to the table for funding and for solving problems caused by rightsizing in 1992.

An early morning fire on December 28, 2005, at 6500 South Boulevard, Harrelson Ford, went to a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm assignment quickly. A fire in the repair and auto body shop resulted in approximately \$500,000.00 in damages. An employee was charged and arrested for starting the fire to cover a break in.

Funding for MEDIC, the county paramedic ambulance service, had not kept pace with demand, and problems with management led the County Commission to appoint a Blue Ribbon Committee to make recommendations about the future of MEDIC and emergency medical services. Deputy Chief Roger Weaver was responsible for the Charlotte Fire Department's bid to establish a fire-based EMS system in Mecklenburg County. Ultimately, the Commissioners decided to give the responsibility to a consortium established by Carolinas Medical Center and Presbyterian Hospital.

In a fire that got national attention, the old church building at Matthew-Murkland Presbyterian church, 6917 Old Providence Road, was completely destroyed on June 6, 1996. The wood frame structure was vacant and being used for storage. The closest hydrant was inoperative, and firefighters were hampered in their efforts to establish an adequate water supply from the nearest hydrant. Investigators determined that the fire was intentionally ignited and traced it to a thirteen year old south Charlotte girl who was involved with Satanism. She was convicted in juvenile court. This was one of a rash of arson fires in Southern African-American churches. President Bill Clinton established



the National Arson Prevention Initiative through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Charlotte was chosen and participated as one of the pilot Cities for this program.

In 1996, an important station renovation program began with a controversy. New stations are built with separate bathrooms for males and females, as required by the North Carolina Building Code. At Station 29, however, the bathrooms were never labeled as such. The female firefighters shared a bathroom with the male officers. When the ladder company moved from Station 3 to Station 29, one of the officers refused to allow the women to use the separate bathroom. The women protested, and a ruling from the Assistant City Attorney assigned to the Fire Department determined the women were correct in their protest. As a result, the Department sought and was given funding to renovate all fire stations where there were no separate facilities. The process was completed in 2002.

After providing maintenance services for its own apparatus for 85 years, the Charlotte Fire Department closed its Mechanical Shop on May 1, 1997. The function was transferred to the Equipment Services Division of the Business Support Services Key Business. Equipment Services won the bid to provide maintenance on all City vehicles, including fire apparatus. They still provide this service today.



The Fire Department put Engine 31 and Engine 32 in service in June 1997 to serve annexation areas. Both were originally housed in temporary facilities. Station 31, located at 3820 Ridge Road, opened in April 1999 to serve Highland Creek on the north end of the city. Station 32, located at 9225 Bryant Farms Road, serves Ballantyne in south Charlotte. This station opened in 2000.

Deputy Chief Roger Weaver retired in October 1997 and Battalion Chief David Duffy was promoted to replace him.

Chief Fincher ran for and won the position of Second Vice President of the International Association of Fire Chiefs in August 1997. He was in that position 1997-1998, First Vice President 1998-1999 and President 1999-2000. He was the fourth Charlotte Fire Chief to be President of IAFC, along with Hendrix Palmer, Donald Charles, and Jack Lee.

Fire Station 8, located at 1201 The Plaza, was renovated in 1998-1999. This station had originally opened in 1948 and was in dire need of updating. There was not enough space to adequately house the two engine companies assigned there, so the station was gutted and a two-story addition built on the back of the structure. The Fire Department had originally considered moving Station 8 because of the construction of the Independence Boulevard Freeway has significantly impact its ability to respond on and around the rebuilt road. However, the residents of Plaza-Midwood and Chantilly were adamant about leaving the station in its current location. The renovated station reopened in May 1999.



Two hotels under construction burned in separate multi-alarm fires in fiscal year 1999. The first occurred November 1, 1998 at 8405 Pineville-Matthews Road. Fire loss

was estimated at \$1,900,000. The second occurred at 8520 East Independence Boulevard on April 18, 1999. Both were intentionally ignited. Suspects were identified, arrested, and convicted in the second fire.

Deputy Chief James Fesperman retired in October 1998 and Battalion Chief Fred Rich was promoted to replace him.

In January 1999, Battalion Chief Jon Hannan was promoted to Deputy Fire Chief. This replaced the position never filled when Deputy Chief Bobby Davis retired.

Deputy Chief David Taylor retired in August 1999 to become Fire Chief in High Point, NC. Battalion Chief Jim Burke was promoted to replace him.

The Fire Department's accreditation team, led by Battalion Chief Rob Kinniburgh, worked for a year and a half before submitting the completed manual in the spring of 2000. The department had its peer review visit in May 2000. The peer review team gave a positive recommendation and the department

received accredited status from the Commission on Fire Service Accreditation International in August 2000. The Charlotte Fire Department was the first large urban department to be accredited through this agency.

Fire Administration and Emergency Management moved to 228 East Ninth Street in September 2000. A space crunch at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center prompted the Fire Chief to volunteer to move. The Department submitted a capital improvement project request for a permanent headquarters to house Fire Administration, Emergency Management, Fire Prevention, Fire Investigations, Communications, and Logistics.

Residents of Northwoods, Pine Island, and Long Creek were concerned about extended response times to their neighborhoods from Station 25. When the City agreed to voluntarily annex Brookmere, a new subdivision north of Mt. Holly-Huntersville Road, the Fire Department asked for Station 33. Engine 33 went into service in January 2001 when the station was completed at 2001 Mt. Holly-Huntersville Road.



The Operations Division was completely reorganized as Engine 34, Engine 35, Ladder 32, and Battalion 6 were put into service for the June 2001 annexation. Both engine companies went into temporary quarters. Station 34 is located at 2824 Rocky River Road, next to the entrance to Reedy Creek Park, and opened in August 2003. Station 35 is located at

1120 Pavilion Boulevard and opened in June 2003. Battalion 6 went into service at Station 33 but moved and is currently located at Station 25 because there was not enough room at Station 18 for the Battalion Chief. Also at this time, Battalion 2 moved from Station 11 to Station 27 to cover the northeast quadrant of the city.

On September 11, 2001, on duty fire department personnel were notified by Fire Alarm of the terrorist attacks in New York and the Pentagon. This event led to many new security policies and procedures the department still uses today. All active members of the Fire Department on September 11, 2001 wear an American flag award in remembrance of this day.

Deputy Chief Fred Rich retired in December 2001 and Battalion Chief Jeff Dulin was promoted to replace him.

A long-standing need was met with the opening of the new Training Academy in June 2002. The new training building is over 110,000 square feet and has classroom, an auditorium, and workout space for both the Police and Fire Departments. It is located at 1770 Shopton Road, on the same property as the old facility, which now houses a Police division. The back-up 911 and communications center for both departments is located in the building, as is the Emergency Operations Center for Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Charlotte suffered through another natural disaster which began on December 5, 2002. Charlotte received several inches of ice, causing massive damage to trees and knocking out electricity to the Charlotte and adjacent areas from several days to weeks. Fire companies responded to seventy six significant fires during the remaining twenty six days of December.

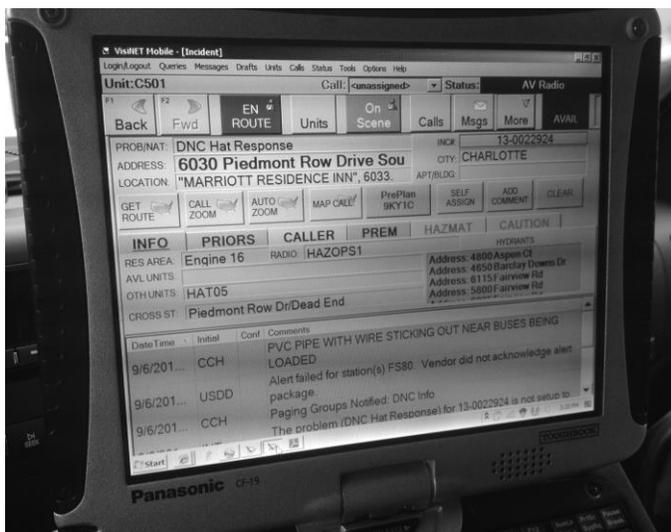


On January 8, 2003, US Airways Express Flight 5481 crashed at approximately 8:49 a.m., seconds after takeoff from Charlotte Douglas International Airport, killing all nineteen passengers and the two crew members. Flight 5481 was a Beech 1900 twin turbo prop aircraft. The plane took off and could

not maintain altitude, veered left and stuck the corner of the US Airways Heavy Maintenance Hanger. The NTSB concluded that the cause of the crash involved two components, the flight was overweight and a previous maintenance issue had not been properly tested prior to the aircraft being placed back into service. CFD resources were on the scene for several days removing the victims and assisting the NTSB.

In May 2003, the Department opened a new burn building at the Training Academy. This facility replaced the original one dating from the mid-seventies, which had become unsafe. The new burn building is a state-of-the-art training facility which uses natural gas to create fire scenarios so that firefighters learn how to suppress fires effectively.

After several years of intense planning and work, the Department implemented new computer-aided dispatching and records management systems activated at midnight on June 4, 2003. Legacy



mainframe systems served the Department's needs for a quarter of a century, but the technology was obsolete and extremely limited in its capabilities. The Department purchased VisiCAD from Tritech of San Diego for the computer-aided dispatching system and FDM Software of Vancouver, British Columbia for the records management system. Also implemented at that time were an automatic vehicle locator system and a mobile status

terminal system in fire apparatus. Considering the complexity of the project, the implementation was as smooth as could be expected. Funding came from the 911 surcharge, which is levied on telephone lines to support emergency operations.

Engine 36 and Ladder 32 went into service on June 14, 2003 due to annexation, which was effective on June 30, 2003. Engine 36 was housed at Station 35 until Station 36, located at 2325 West Mallard Creek Church Road, was completed in the fall of 2004.

An electrical short caused a three alarm fire at Big Pineville AME Zion Church, located at 10562 Providence Road West, on October 8, 2003. Estimated loss was \$825,000.

In 2004, the US Department of Homeland Security recognized Charlotte-Mecklenburg as one of the best prepared communities in the nation. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, homeland security became an issue locally as well as nationally. Charlotte already had an Advanced Local Emergency Response Team (ALERT), a group of first responders from all the public safety



and public health agencies which train together to ensure quick and efficient response to the scene of a large local emergency.

Emergency Management brought together the department heads of all the public safety and public health agencies in Mecklenburg County to begin a process to plan for the overall security of the county. This group was successful in applying for

grants for all the departments, bringing in approximately \$23 million over a six-year period. The money was used to buy equipment for public safety and public health agencies in an eleven county region surrounding Mecklenburg, both in North Carolina and South Carolina. For example, one of the big projects was radio interoperability; radio equipment was purchased for all the agencies in the region so that they could communicate quickly and effectively.

A static discharge sparked a four alarm blaze at Reagents, located at 4647 Sweden Road, on May 6, 2004. The loss at the chemical distribution company was estimated at \$1,250,000.

A Myers Park mansion under renovation was struck by arson twice in the fall of 2004. On November 21, 2004, a three-alarm fire caused an estimated \$1,250,000 in damages. A second incendiary fire, also a three-alarm incident, caused \$500,000 damages on Christmas Eve 2004. The case is still open.

Deputy Chief James Burke retired in December 2004 and Battalion Chief Howard “Pete” Key was promoted to replace him.

In January 2005, Sylvia Smith-Phifer was the first African American female with the department to be promoted to Captain.

The cab of Engine 8 caught fire around 11:30 p.m. on May 6, 2005. Smoke conditions in the apparatus bay at Station 8 precluded the firefighters at Station 8 from getting to their equipment and extinguishing the fire. Fortunately, the sprinkler system kept the fire in check until Engine 4, Engine 1, and Engine 7 could arrive. Investigators determined that a handlight covered by a turnout coat overheated and caused the fire. Fire loss was estimated at \$25,000 to the building and \$425,000 to the vehicles and equipment in the apparatus bay.

The Operations Division was reorganized as Battalion 7, Engine 37, and Ladder 33 went into service for the June 2005 annexation. Battalion 7 was located at Station 32. Engine 37 is located at 13828 South Tryon Street. Engine 38 was activated, after Station 37 opened, and was housed in the temporary facility on Sledge Road while Station 38 was under construction. Station 38 is now located at 12100 Shopton Road West, at the bridge over Armour Creek.



On August 15, 2005, CFD companies responded to the corner of Winthrop Avenue and East Boulevard for a structure fire. Engine 2 arrived on the scene and immediately requested a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm at 7:28 p.m. A 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm was struck at 7:35 p.m. by Battalion 1 and a 4<sup>th</sup> alarm was struck at 8:05 p.m. The building was a 2 story wooden condominium complex which suffered extensive fire damage throughout. Investigators were unable to identify what caused the fire due to this damage. Losses exceeded \$1,000,000.00.

During the time period of December 2005 through May 2006, a series of small fires and several significant structure fires occurred in the Dilworth community. Residents were uneasy and the fires were a hot media topic until Fire Investigators made an arrest of a female resident in the community.

An almost-completed mansion at 6509 Glynmoor Lakes Drive in Piper Glen burned in a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm fire on September 5, 2006. Investigators determined the fire began when an electrical cord was pinched between the door and the jamb at the front door and overheated. The loss was estimated at \$3,000,000.00.



On February 22, 2007, CFD responded to an apartment fire at 992 Shady Oak Trail, Quail Run Condos. The fire quickly escalated to a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm assignment. Efforts of the fire companies on scene saved 20 of the 30 units from serious damage. Fire losses were estimated at \$750,000.00.

CFD companies responded to a reported house explosion at 2928 Ross Avenue on June 20 2007. Upon arrival, CFD companies observed a fully involved house fire. The fire originated when two teens, hired by a friend to burn the house for insurance monies, poured a large quantity of gasoline in the structure and ignited it. The teens were located shortly afterwards at area hospitals suffering from significant burns. Both were arrested and convicted. Ironically, CFD fire companies and the Task Force had responded to the same house on June 13, 2007, where multiple intentionally ignited fires had been identified in the structure. The investigation into that incident was moving quickly when this event occurred.

On December 6, 2007, CFD was dispatched to an EMS call at 4400 Sharon Road. Upon arrival, Ladder 16 discovered that a portion of the parking deck had collapsed trapping one victim in a vehicle. A second alarm was struck as well as the USAR Teams responding. The victim was extricated safely by Ladder 16 and Engine 12. It appears that the female driver suffered some type of medical problem, drove through a large planter, and hit the wall of the parking deck at a high rate of speed. The impact damaged the wall causing the floor to collapse.

Ladder 32 arrived on the scene at 10921 Deerberry Court, June 25, 2007, confirming a working fire with flames showing from the roof. The crew of Ladder 32 entered the structure and proceeded to a second floor bedroom. Upon entering the bedroom, the roof collapsed behind the crew and cut off their means of egress. A may-day was transmitted and Command requested an evacuation of the structure. A 2nd alarm was struck due to the mayday. There were no injuries sustained by the firefighters that had transmitted the may-day and they were able to escape through a bathroom window on the rear of the structure. Investigators were able to determine the fire originated when the house was struck by lightning. Fire losses were estimated at \$250,000.



On December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Fire Chief Luther Fincher retired after forty two years of service to the Charlotte Fire Department. During his tenure as Fire Chief numerous positive changes occurred within the department, many which still impact the department today. In a traditional transfer of Command ceremony at the Government Center, Deputy Fire Chief Jon B. Hannan was promoted to Fire Chief.

Battalion Chief Richard O. Granger was promoted to Deputy Fire Chief on January 12, 2008 to replace Chief Hannan.

Deputy Chief David Duffy retired December 29, 2007 and Battalion Chief Robert D. Kinniburgh was promoted to replace him.

The year 2008 would start with significant changes in the Command staff duties. Deputy Chief Jeff Dulin was assigned as the Special Operations and Hazmat Chief as well as being the Deputy over Fire Alarm. Deputy Chief Rich Granger was assigned the duties of Administrative Deputy Chief, to include Human Resources, Budget, Health and Safety, and Logistics. Deputy Chief Pete Key was assigned as the Operations Chief over all three Operations shifts. Deputy Chief Rob Kinniburgh was assigned the duties of Fire Marshal and as the Deputy Chief over Fire Investigation/Education, Fire Prevention/Plans Review, and CFD Information Technology.

At 03:40 in the morning on February 4, 2008, companies responded to 6002 Patricia Ryan Drive for a reported house fire. Upon arrival, fire companies had heavy fire showing. Once the fire was knocked down, a search of the residence was conducted and two victims were located. One firefighter sustained burns to his shoulder. The investigation revealed that the victims had been killed prior to the fire. Fire Investigation and CMPD Homicide worked in conjunction and arrests were made. As of December 2013, the case has not gone to trial.

Dry conditions and high winds resulted in a 2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm fire on February 20, 2008. Ladder 32, Engine 32 and Battalion 7 arrived at 7938 Marie Roget Way to find a two story dwelling, heavily involved with fire, two exposures with working fires, multiple fast moving grass, pine needle, and shrub fires impinging on multiple exposures. The incident was controlled utilizing a total of two elevated streams and twelve attack lines, ranging in size from a booster to 2 ½ inch lines. They were pumped by three Engine companies and 2 Ladder companies supplied by three hydrants via relay pumping operations. The cause of the fire was determined to be accidental due to discarded smoking material in the pine needles beside 7938 Marie Roget Way. All total, there were 12 single family dwellings damaged, one with substantial damage (\$150,000.00), two with significant damage (\$20,000.00 each), two with exterior damage involving electrical (\$10,000.00 each), and the remaining seven exterior damage to vinyl siding (\$5,000.00 each).



A 3 alarm fire occurred at the Perkinson Company on March 2, 2008. First arriving companies had heavy fire showing from the front and rear of the business. Firefighters were hampered by iron bars on the windows and the early collapse of the metal truss roof. The fire was intentionally ignited by a cleaning company employee to cover the theft of metal. The suspect was tried and convicted.

At 1928 hours on June 2, 2008, Battalion 7, Engines 16, 20, 12, and Ladder 16 were dispatched to 8425 Winged Bourne for a possible structure fire. Due to the volume of 911 calls and more information, CFD Communications upgraded the call and added Battalion 5, Engine 14, and Rescue 3

to the response. Two companies reported a heavy column of smoke in the area immediately after departing their stations. Engine 16 was first to arrive and reported a three story structure with fire through the roof. At 1938 hours Battalion 5 ordered a 2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm. A 3<sup>rd</sup> Alarm was requested at 1957 hours. Over 150 emergency service personnel from the City and County were on the scene at one time. The structure was under construction and approximately 18,000 square feet. The estimated loss was \$4,500,000.00. The fire was listed as intentionally ignited and is still an open case.



A natural gas explosion in a single family dwelling occurred on June 19, 2008. Engine 7 arrived at 410 Wellingford Street to find that the structure had been obliterated. There were three victims, two adults and one infant in the structure at the time of the explosion. The infant was pronounced DOA by Medic and the

adults were transported with minor injuries. The Fire Investigation Task Force determined that this explosion was the result of the natural gas valve being turned on and with the cap missing from a t-shaped connector in the crawl space, natural gas was able to slowly free flow into the crawl space, walls, and the attic of the residence for approximately one hour and forty two minutes prior to the pilot light for the water heater igniting the gas vapors.

Charlotte received a record amount of rain on September 10, 2008. Just after 4 p.m. firefighters began receiving numerous calls for service in regards to flash flooding. Over the next three hours Charlotte firefighters responded to approximately forty weather related incidents. Of those forty incidents, twenty two calls for service were for flood emergencies which involved numerous evacuations and rescues using swift water rescue gear and boats. There were no injuries to citizens or firefighters reported.

Fire Station 39, located near the Arboretum Shopping Center, was placed into service on December 20, 2008, to support the needs of a growing part of south east Charlotte that includes large residential neighborhoods and retail establishments. Though initially opposed by several neighbors, a settlement was reached and the station has become an integral part of the community. Engine 39, SMAT, and Battalion 7 are housed there.

On March 14, 2009, Battalion 4 companies responded to 6609 Monroe Road # 7, to a reported apartment fire. While enroute and upon arrival, fire companies were told that there were trapped victims on the second floor. CFD Telecommunicators stayed on the line with one victim until she succumbed to the smoke and heat. Heavy fire and intense heat conditions on the first floor delayed firefighters from advancing to the second floor quickly. After the initial fire attack, fire companies located three female victims, one adult and two children, on the second floor. One victim was pronounced DOA. The other two victims were transported to CMC-Main but died shortly after arrival there. The fire was the result of a teen male who put oil on to cook french fries and fell asleep. A short time later he awoke and discovered the fire. He opened the rear sliding door but the fire continued to grow, so he exited through the front door, leaving it open. This created a chimney effect with the stairwell, trapping the sleeping victims upstairs. Fire loss was estimated at approximately \$150,000.00.

The Charlotte area suffered from flash flooding on May 5, 2009. The Doral Apartments, known for flooding due to their location at Bramlet Road and Monroe Road, once again flooded. Evacuations of the residents were made using swift water rescue gear and boats. No injuries were reported. This complex continues to flood today.



Engine 40 was placed into service in June 2009 due to the annexation of the Albemarle Road and Harrisburg Road area. Engine 40 ran out of Station 34 while Station 40 was constructed.

At approximately 7:24 a.m., December 19, 2009, Engine 39 was dispatched to a commercial fire alarm at Avanti Pizza, 8128-100 Providence Road. Upon their arrival, they found heavy smoke conditions and upgraded to a working fire. The fire was extinguished in a short time with no injuries to fire or civilian personnel. Investigators determined the fire was intentionally ignited and the case remains open. Fire losses were approximately \$350,000.00.

On January 8, 2010, at 4:40 a.m., the Charlotte Fire Department responded to a reported structure fire at 9801 Emerald Pointe Drive. CFD Fire Alarm reported a working structure fire with people trapped on a third floor balcony. Engine 38 arrived on the scene reporting heavy fire and smoke showing from the third floor of a multi-family condominium building. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck 4:48 a.m. During fire suppression, two female occupants were rescued from their balcony. Investigators determined the fire was intentionally ignited by the boyfriend of a female who lived in the fire apartment. He was arrested but never tried in court due to the girlfriend changing her mind and refusing to cooperate with the District Attorney's office. Fire losses exceeded \$700,000.00.

On January 13, 2010, Battalion 7 companies responded to 11011 Thornhill Club Drive for a two story single family dwelling. Heavy fire was visible upon arrival and the incident eventually went to a third alarm. The fire was the result of radiated heat to insulation placed over the halogen lighting installed in the kitchen ceiling. Fire damage was estimated at approximately \$328,000.00.



In the early hours of January 25, 2010, Charlotte once again received a large amount of rain in a short period of time causing flooding in multiple areas of the City. Fire companies were kept busy for most of the day responding to calls related to the flooding.

Shortly after 6:00 a.m., on February 14, 2010, a box alarm was dispatched to 801 Providence Road, "Big Ben's", a 3700 square foot, turn-of-the-century residence turned popular local restaurant. Engine 6 arrived first to find heavy fire issuing from the second

story. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck 6:24 a.m. and the fire was controlled in approximately seventy minutes. The temperatures had reached into the 20's overnight, causing ice on the roads and surrounding sidewalks. One Captain slipped but only sustained minor injuries. Fire Investigators determined the fire was the result of an overloaded electrical circuit modified in one of the many renovations that had taken place over the years. Fire losses were estimated at over \$200,000.00.

At 3:00 a.m. on March 9, 2010, a structure fire was reported at 1118 ScaleyBark Road, Charlotte Woods Apartments. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck at 3:06 a.m. followed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm at 3:33 a.m. Deputy Fire Chief Pete Key arrived on the scene and requested a 4<sup>th</sup> alarm assignment at 4:17 a.m. Investigators were able to determine the fire originated in a basement storage area and was caused by the carelessly discarded smoking material into combustible materials on the floor. Damage estimates exceeded \$125,000.00.



On March 28, 2010 at 5:52 p.m., CFD and Mecklenburg County fire units responded to multiple incidents caused by a tornado that passed through the west side of the City and County. A shared Command Post was established at West Mecklenburg VFD and Deputy Chief Jeff Dulin was the CFD Incident Commander. One victim was rescued from a house where a tree fell through it

in the Wildwood community. Cleanup and power restoration took several days to complete.

Station 40 officially opened on May 24, 2010 at 9720 Harrisburg Road.

At 0532 on June 13, 2010, Charlotte Fire Alarm received a request from Greensboro Fire Department and the Colonial Pipeline Company for foam resources due to a 45,000 gallon tank fire in Greensboro, NC. Engine 25, Foam One, Field Comm, and Deputy Chief R.D. Kinniburgh responded. CFD provided 500 gallons of foam and CFD resources were released shortly after noon time.

An elderly female suffering from dementia was reported missing on July 7, 2010. The incident quickly escalated to a large multi-agency operation beginning at 10:00 a.m. The subject was located at 4:51p.m., dehydrated and with injuries to her feet. The incident concluded at 5:54 p.m.

Ladder 40 was placed in service in July 2010. Station 40 now houses Engine 40, Ladder 40, and Tanker 40.



8124 Tremaine Court was the scene of a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm fire on July 10, 2010. Five victims were transported by Medic. Investigators determined the fire originated in or near an exterior stairwell. Fire losses were estimated at \$435,000.00.

Station 41 opened on July 19, 2010 at 5740-B West Boulevard. The station was designed, built, and is owned by the Air National Guard. The station houses ARFF units only and responds only to incidents on the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport property. CFD members staff the ARFF vehicles along with the Air National Guard members.

On September 14, 2010, at 2:34p.m., CFD companies were dispatched to a reported building fire at 3546 South Bank Court. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck at 2:47p.m. Approximately twenty minutes into the incident, companies were ordered to withdraw from the building due to the amount of fire which was through the roof. Ladder 32 was set up and blitzed the fire area for approximately five minutes which allowed companies to re-enter the structure and extinguish the remaining hot spots. The cause of the fire was determined to be accidental. A worker soldering pipe on an HVAC unit caught an outside wall on fire which in turn spread rapidly to the attic. Damage was estimated at approximately \$250,000.

On October 18, 2010, Charlotte Emergency responders experienced a new situation brought to the forefront with the use of the internet and the events of the world. At approximately 9:30 a.m., CFD units were dispatched to the Turning Point Academy at 2300 W. Sugar Creek Road for a reported

explosive device detonating. The CMPD Bomb Squad and Agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives were on the scene with CFD in a support role. The investigation revealed a student had constructed an ink pen into an explosive device and placed it on the teacher's desk. When the teacher removed the cap, the device detonated injuring their hand. All agencies responded to the suspect's home at 10622 Mt. Holly Road. Multiple items and substances were



located. As the crew members of Hazmat were testing a substance from the house, a glass vial shattered injuring FFs Jefferies, Tysinger and Captain Brent Gordon. They were treated on the scene and transported to CMC Main as a precaution. These members returned to work a short time later. A substance, later confirmed to be home-made TNTP, was removed from the residence. During subsequent scene examination by CFD Fire Investigators, another pen device was located and CFD resources were removed from the structure. The device was rendered safe and during another search by CMPD Bomb Technicians and an Agent from the BATFE, another device was located and rendered safe. All CFD resources were released at 5:35 p.m., almost

thirty two hours after the initial call was made. The suspect was arrested and charged with multiple counts related to explosive devices and manufacturing explosives. On April 18, 2012, the suspects plead guilty and received an active sentence of 38 to 55 months in prison.

A fire at the Charlotte Pipe and Foundry occurred on December 12, 2010. A second alarm was struck at 2:50 a.m. followed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm 3:27 a.m. Investigators determined that heat from a natural gas heater ignited nearby flammable liquids. Damage was estimated at \$100,000.00.

On November 24, 2010, a second alarm fire occurred at 8015 Ballantyne Commons Parkway, Saint Michaels Catholic Church. A fire occurred on the roof and was the result of decorative lights attached to the wooden structure components. Another 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm fire occurred in a single family residence at 413 Mammoth Oaks, Lane. Investigators determined the fire was intentionally ignited with damages estimated at \$500,000.00. The case is still open.

Fireboat 38 was placed in service on December 14, 2010. It is housed in a separate floating station behind Station 38.

The year 2010 closed out with another significant fire at 6304 Reafield Drive, Reafield Village Apartments. The original alarm was at 10:25a.m., the 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck at 10:30 a.m. A roof collapse, at 10:51a.m., resulted in a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm being struck at 10:58 a.m. There were several more partial collapses during fire suppression. Investigators determined the fire originated in the attic area of the building allowing the fire to spread quickly. Damages were estimated in excess of \$540,000.00.



A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm fire at 7317 Winery Lane, on January 10, 2011, occurred in an eight unit condominium complex. An electrical failure fire between the floors ignited the fire. A 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm fire at 308 Queens Road, Queens Station Condominiums, occurred the next

evening, January 11, 2011. It took all hands working about an hour to bring the incident under control. Improperly discarded smoking material was the cause of the fire.

In early 2011, the last of the old second Engine companies was retired from service. Engine 64 was renumbered to Engine 42 and continued to be housed at Station 8 until a new in fill station, Station 42, was being constructed.

The City of Charlotte was officially announced at the Host City for the 2012 Democratic National Convention on February 1, 2011. The Convention was schedule to be held in September 2012. For the next year and a half, CFD would purchase a vast amount of equipment and receive extensive training for this event.

On February 15, 2011, a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm fire occurred at 1225 South Caldwell Street, Strawn Apartments. A catastrophic failure occurred in the primary electrical service. This incident required the evacuation of approximately 128 occupants. The building was out of service for several weeks while the repairs were made.

Smoke was reported coming from the Goodwill Industries Store at 6607 South Boulevard on February 23, 2011. A second alarm was struck as crews worked diligently to control the fast moving fire in the showroom area. Investigators determined the fire was intentionally ignited and arrested a female ex-employee and two other males several months later for setting the fire using gasoline. The case was handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Charlotte with all three receiving active jail time. Losses were over \$1,000,000.00. The store, an anchor for the community surrounding the area, was rebuilt and reopened in September 2011.

The night of April 5, 2011 was a busy night for CFD resources. A spring storm brought high winds to the area resulting in CFD companies responding to over a hundred storm related incidents between approximately 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.

On Wednesday, April 13, 2011 at 4:06 a.m., CFD Alarm received emergency radio traffic from



Engine 08 in reference to a working structure fire at 609 North Davidson Street. Engine 8 happened upon the fire while returning to quarters from a previous assignment. The structure was a three story mutli family apartment building. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck upon Engine 8's arrival at 4:06

a.m. A 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm was struck at 4:18 a.m. by Battalion 1. Deputy Fire Chief Pete Key arrived on the scene and assumed command of the incident at 4:30 a.m. Fire Chief Jon Hannan arrived on the scene

at 4:42 a.m. and a 4<sup>th</sup> alarm was struck at 4:51 a.m. It took crews more than an hour to bring the fire under control but fire companies would work throughout the night overhauling and putting out spot fires. The investigation revealed that the fire had originated on the third floor wooden balcony when the occupant carried a charcoal grill up from the yard where he has cooked supper, up the stairs and set it on directly on the wooden deck of his unit. Ironically, the decks of this building were protected by a sidewall fire sprinkler; however, the system had been shut down when a pipe burst several months prior to the fire. The sprinkler company had been contacted but refused to respond and repair the system until the complex settled up on multiple outstanding bills. For unknown reasons, the complex management opted to leave the system shut off resulting in this fire which caused over \$100,000.00 in damages.

A mayday was issued during a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm house fire at 2915 Polo Ridge Court on June 21, 2011. During suppression operations, a firefighter was trapped briefly while trying to access the second floor on the main stairwell. The firefighter was treated at Presbyterian Main for a leg injury. The cause of the fire was a lighting strike.



On July 14, 2011, just after noon, CFD Alarm received a 911 call stating a worker was trapped in a trench at 2724 Thornbush Court. Engine 9 arrived on the scene to find a male patient buried chest deep in a six foot trench surrounded by asphalt, stone, and muddy clay. Over the next hour, nearly 50 firefighters worked to provide air monitoring, shuttle equipment, establish a helicopter landing zone, provide rehab, and ultimately,

effect rescue. The patient was flown to CMC-Main with non- life threatening injuries.

Charlotte received approximately six inches of rain within a few hours on August 5, 2011. CFD units were kept busy responding to incidents related to flooding. One of the most tragic events of the day was a call to Sardis Road North and Coronation Boulevard, possibly three missing persons in the creek. A theft prevention employee of a nearby business chased three shoplifters away from the store. One was apprehended and the other two, a mother and daughter, jumped into the creek off of

Crownpoint Executive Drive. The employee then jumped in after them and was heard on his two-way radio saying that he was drowning. The employee was found alive by a Matthews Police Officer upstream. The employee said he saw the mother and daughter jump in with the daughter never resurfacing and the mother last seen hanging on to a tree branch. By this same time, CMPD discovered the mother had a prior offense that required her to wear a tracking bracelet. CMPD was able to ping the bracelet which sadly, led directly to her body. An extensive operation was needed to remove the victim from the water and up the embankment. The second victim was found on the afternoon of August 6, 2011. Area creeks and rivers stayed above flood levels for several days.

An active ammonia leak occurred on August 22, 2011 at 11922 General Drive, ProFlowers, Inc. Hazmat crews were able to enter the facility in Level A protection and secure the leak. The investigation revealed a blown seal was the cause and an estimated 1,000 pounds of ammonia was released during the incident.

On August 27, 2011, at 10:23 a.m. CFD companies were dispatched to a fire alarm activation at 201 North Tryon Street, the Charlotte Plaza Building. A confirmed fire in an electrical room was located in the basement. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck at



10:39 a.m. Ladder 4 advised that they were unable to make entry as the Building Engineer stated that the fire involved three, 45,000 volt disconnects, and could not determine if the water on the floor was energized. Due to smoke being located on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor, a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm was struck at 10:41 a.m. The incident was controlled at 11:39 a.m. Investigators were able to determine that the fire originated when water from a leaking drain dripped on the main electrical buss bar eventually causing it to short out. The building was closed for several days as emergency repairs were made. Damage estimates were in excess of \$1,000,000.00.

On January 29, 2012, Station 42 officially opened at 5620 Central Avenue. Engine 42 moved from Station 8 and Battalion 4 moved from Station 3 to make this the new Battalion 4 Station. This station was needed to fill in a gap between Stations 3, 15, and 23, reducing response times.

Construction began on the new Charlotte Fire Department Headquarters in February 2012. The building will be located on the corner of Graham Street and Statesville Avenue. It will be two stories and house Fire Administration, Emergency Management, Public Information Office, CFD IT, and Fire Prevention. The project will cost approximately 17 million dollars and is expected to be completed in June 2014.

Shortly after midnight on April 3, 2012, the Plaza Rod Extension area of Charlotte was hit by a tornado which blew trees over and destroyed multiple houses. Fire Companies responded throughout the night and next day to related incidents. CFD resources worked throughout the night and into the next day.

Fire Companies from the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived at 7121 Nations Ford Road around 4:21 a.m. on June 13, 2012 to find a vacant structure and an adjacent vacant building on fire. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck and



the fires were contained within a short time.

Investigators determined that both structures were intentionally ignited and the cases remain open.

Just three days later, June 16, 2012, another 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm fire occurred at a business located at 716 East Boulevard.

Investigators were able to identify an area of origin but not a specific heat

source. Damages were estimated at \$200,000.00.

CFD companies were dispatched to 3210 North Davidson Street, CFD Station 7, on July 21, 2012. Engine 7 had been dispatched on a run when the fire was reported. First in crews located smoke in the station and then located fire issuing from the dishwasher in the kitchen. It was determined that the dishwasher was under a recall when this event occurred. Minimal damage to the station and kitchen occurred.

On July 20, 2012, a significant amount of rainfall occurred throughout the Charlotte area. The Southpark area received approximately 3.5 inches of rain in a two hour period. This caused a partial collapse of the roof on Southpark Mall resulting in damage to several stores and the underground parking deck to flood. CFD resources were on the scene for an extended time and worked with Property Management and Building Standards to implement a plan of action for scene security and repairs.

The Democratic National Convention was held in Charlotte September 4 through 6, 2012. CFD resources were in place and ready for the estimated 35,000 visitors to the City. No major incidents related to the Convention occurred. Most CFD personnel who worked the convention enjoyed being Ambassadors for the City and working a once in a career event of this magnitude.



At 1:11 a.m. on December 15, 2012, Battalion 1 and 3 companies were dispatched to 1407 East Third Street for a working fire in a business, Bojangles Chicken and Biscuits. The fire was controlled in approximately thirty six minutes. Investigators believed the fire was intentionally set but could not locate enough physical evidence to support their theory. Damages exceeded \$300,000.00. The popular restaurant reopened after several months while repairs were made.

A sudden weather change on February 16, 2013, produced blizzard like conditions with several inches of snow quickly accumulating. Members at Station 21 reported hearing a loud noise similar to rumbling thunder. Within moments, a 911 call was received reporting an above ground storage tank explosion at 7220 Mount Holly Road, Eco-Energy.

Upon arrival, Engine 21 reported a working fire in a large above ground storage tank and upgraded the incident to a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm. It took seventy firefighters using a master stream and foam almost four hours to bring the incident to a close. The investigation revealed that



the 25,000 gallon storage tank contained ethanol and was ignited by a lightning strike.

On the morning of February 24, 2013, companies responded to 6015 Glendale Chase Court, Tyvola Center Apartment Homes. With heavy fire showing upon arrival from the third floor, a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck followed shortly by a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm. A partial roof collapse briefly trapped and injured a firefighter. A second firefighter suffered an injury during the outside ground operations. Both were treated and released later in the day. It took the eighty firefighters on the scene almost an hour to bring the incident under control. During the suppression efforts, a resident backed his vehicle over several hand lines and a supply line hampering suppression efforts for a short time. Investigators determined the fire originated in the attic area above the third floor balcony. Damages were estimated at \$500,000.00.

Battalion 5 companies responded to 8426 Lodge South Circle at 2:27 a.m., Sun Valley Apartments, for a working fire on April 10, 2013. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm was struck followed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm assignment. Two male victims, each with significant burn injuries, were located on the ground outside the burning building. Both were transported to CMC-Main and then onto the NC Burn Center in Chapel Hill, NC.

The three story multifamily building was a total loss with damages exceeding \$208,000.00. Investigators determined that the fire was accidental and started on the third floor balcony.

A 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm house fire occurred at 9769 Stoney Hill Drive on June 17, 2013 at 11:55 p.m. The two single family residence suffered extensive damage throughout. Investigators determined the fire originated on the rear porch due to a candle left burning near newspapers on a table and caused approximately \$170,000.00 in damages. One firefighter was transported for minor injuries.

June 18, 2013, fire companies responded to an overturned tractor and trailer on Interstate 85 South at Exit 38, Interstate 77 South. The fuel tanks had breached spreading two hundred plus gallons of burning diesel fuel across the roadway. The driver self-extricated himself but not before suffering second and third degree burns on his face, head and arms.

Two significant multi alarm fires kept Battalion 4 firefighters busy during October, 2013. On October 16, 2013, at 10:22 p.m., fire companies responded to 8235 Carter Creek Drive, Matthews Crossing Apartments. Upon arrival, fire companies had heavy fire showing from the third floor and attic of an apartment building. Ladder 29 struck a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm and began suppression efforts. The building was situated back from the road where ladder trucks could reach the roof. At 10:30 p.m. a roof collapsed was reported. Battalion 4 assumed Command and struck a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm at 10:40 p.m. The fire was controlled at 11:57 p.m.

Investigators were able to determine that the fire originated on the third floor balcony and was the result of improperly discarded smoking material. Damage estimates were \$750,000.00.

On October 20, 2013, at 3:01 a.m., Battalion 4 companies responded to 8020 Tremaine Court for a working fire in a two



story wood frame building containing eight condominiums. First in fire companies were met with heavy fire conditions on a rear stairwell and requested a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm assignment. A lady trapped in the

fire apartment was trapped and jumped from the second floor window, receiving moderate injuries, before firefighters could get to her. A 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm was struck at 3:08 a.m. The fire was controlled in approximately forty five minutes. Investigators determined that this fire was intentionally ignited and resulted in approximately \$250,000.00 in damages.

Engine 3 was dispatched to a report of smoke in the area of 6511 Monroe Road, Silver Oaks Apartments on December 5, 2013. Upon arrival they reported a working fire and began suppression operations. Two victims were trapped on the second floor and were rescued by Engine 3 using ground ladders to the second floor. Investigators determined the fire originated on the stove due to unattended cooking.

Westside fire companies responded to 527 Porter Street for a working house fire on December 16, 2013. An elderly female victim was rescued by Ladder 13 members from a front bedroom. She was transported to CMC-Main and then onto the NC Burn Center in Chapel Hill, NC. Two other occupants fled the residence when the fire was discovered. Investigators determined the fire originated on the stovetop due to unattended cooking.

Firefighters were kept busy as 2013 came to a close. From December 25 through December 31, CFD



fire companies responded to thirteen working structure fires. Two vacant houses and an accidental house fire occurred on December 25, 2013. December 27, was a very busy day for firefighters. At 1:04 a.m., fire companies were dispatched to 5344 Central Avenue for a fire alarm in a business,

Estramonte Chiropractic Services. Upon arrival, Engine 42 and Battalion 4 initially had nothing showing and then observed smoke from the attic area. Fire crews reported fire in the attic and in a basement area. Battalion 4 struck a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm at 1:33 a.m. and a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm at 1:45 a.m. The fire was controlled at 2:27 a.m. Investigators were able to determine the fire originated in rags, which had

been used to wipe oil products off patients, due to spontaneous combustion. Damages were estimated at \$600,000.00. While the fire on Central Avenue was ongoing, another working fire occurred in an automotive business at 2325 North Tryon Street. This fire was due to an electrical failure. Later in the morning at 8:42 a.m., an accidental fire occurred in a business at 4913 Chastain Avenue due to a towel being placed on top of a portable heater. At 11:05 p.m., another business fire occurred at 1519 Central Avenue, Social Status, a clothing and tennis shoe store. Engine 7, temporarily housed at Station 8, was the first on the scene and declared a working fire. Battalion 1 requested a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm at 23:13 p.m. The fire was controlled at 23:39 p.m. Investigators determined the fire originated in wiring for display boxes on the rear wall of the showroom. Damages were estimated a \$165,000.00. The next day, December 28, an accidental house fire occurred at 3603 Sloan Street. On December 29, an accidental fire occurred at 5034 Patricia Ann Lane. On December 30, an accidental house fire occurred at 3226 Allen Road South. On December 31, accidental structure fires occurred at 6700 Duncroft Lane and 4201 Waterford Valley Circle. Fittingly, at 11:58:33, on December 31, 2013, companies were dispatched to a working structure fire at 214 Lander Street, an accidental fire in a vacant house.

The Charlotte Fire Department responded to a total of 99,013 incidents for the calendar year 2013. The CFD resources were 8 Battalions, 42 fire stations, 58 companies and a multitude of other special apparatus and equipment, 1,168 employees, and a budget of \$107,326,498.00. In the near future, the new Headquarters will be completed. Logistics and the Fire Investigation Task Force are scheduled to move into two existing buildings at 1615 North Graham Street, and funding has been secured for the joint Communications and Emergency Operations Center, to be located behind Headquarters.